AIDS NARRATIVES AND THE QUESTION OF READING

WITNESS TO RESPONSIBILITY:

AIDS NARRATIVES AND THE QUESTION OF READING

By

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Abstract

The current age of AIDS has seen the emergence of a body of literature whose goal it is to make AIDS, its multifarious meanings and overwhelmingly devastating effects, not only visible, but also somehow comprehensible to as many people as possible. Much of this literature is produced by gay men and women, who are among the most intimate witnesses to the AIDS crisis. This thesis explores three AIDS narratives as manifestations of the writers' responsibilities as witnesses to and of HIV and AIDS. The first chapter examines Amy Hoffman's *Hospital Time* as an act of mourning through which she seeks to shape the reader as a mourner. Mourning is a responsibility, I argue, that Hoffman does not allow the reader to refuse. Reading Derek Jarman's diary *Modern Nature* through Jacques Derrida's reading of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* in *The Ear of the Other*, Chapter Two theorizes the activist potential of the "signature." Through his garden, Jarman demonstrates how he produces a signature for his dead friends, enabling them to "live"eternally. With this signature Jarman sculpts the reader's own signature, the signature through which he intends for the reader to grant him "life" after death. It is the exposition of the possibility of life through the signature that Jarman understands as his responsibility as a witness to AIDS. And finally, Chapter Three examines Dale Peck's *Martin and John* as a theorization of the "middle ground" between dominant culture's representations of HIV and AIDS and AIDS activist representations. As a metafictional text, the structure of the novel requests the reader to

interpret and negotiate recursively these representations. It is this very request that Peck illustrates as his responsibility. Thus, the writers' foremost responsibility, I propose, is to reproduce in the reader what the writer understands as his or her own responsibilities in witnessing AIDS. The reader must become the witness.

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Introduction

Of what does the duty, the responsibility, of the witness consist who thinks and talks about AIDS?

– Alexander García Düttman, *At Odds With AIDS* 69

The call to witness – the demand to make AIDS or all that is signified and effected by AIDS somehow perceivable – is a repeated refrain in AIDS activist discourse. And it is a call taken up in and met by writing. In the current age of AIDS, there exists a large and growing number of activists – many of them members of gay and lesbian communities, the communities most affected and paradoxically most afforded a voice by AIDS – who figure their "responsibility" as primary witnesses to the devastation of HIV and AIDS through writing. Much of the body of literature that has emerged in the face of the AIDS crisis, then, is explicitly self-representational and simultaneously directed outwards towards a reader who is meant to witness – not only see but also retell – the writer's own witnessing. Thus, many of these writers witness not only AIDS, but also, through AIDS, they witness, tell of, and observe themselves.

The texts with which I am concerned in this thesis, Amy Hoffman's *Hospital Time*, Derek Jarman's *Modern Nature*, and Dale Peck's *Martin and John*, enact this kind of paradigm of writing AIDS. That is, each text represents AIDS to some degree through a certain technical, by which I mean, formal mode or genre of self-representation. Hoffman's memoir, for example, recollects her friend Michael Riegle not only through Hoffman's own

experiences as his health-care proxy during his AIDS-related illness, but also through the narrative of her own mourning. Filmmaker, painter, writer, gardener, and "one of Britain's most indefatigably queer gay men" (Watney, "Derek Jarman" 84), Jarman uses his personal diary to think and talk about, to witness HIV and AIDS. And Peck's novel, although not explicitly autobiographical, is stylistically self-representational. That is, Peck uses literary techniques most often associated with metafiction to produce a text whose representations of HIV and AIDS are formally self-reflexive. This is not to say that the "responsibility" of the witness who thinks and talks about AIDS, as evidenced by these writers and their texts, is solely self-representation or self-examination. Rather, it is through these three modes of self-representation that these writers, as witnesses of the AIDS crisis, illustrate their responsibility in such a role.

"Of what does the duty, the responsibility, of the witness consist who thinks and talks about AIDS?" (Düttman 69). This, then, is the question this thesis asks of these writers and their texts. But in my very asking such a question the texts manifest at least in part their responsibility as witnesses. For I, the reader, am responding to AIDS. It is precisely the ability of the texts to reproduce in the reader what the writer understands as his or her responsibility in witnessing HIV and AIDS with which this thesis is concerned. That is, using the memoir, diary, and metafiction, Hoffman, Jarman, and Peck respectively seek to internalize in the reader the different responsibilities they envision and enact in their roles as witnesses, as those who think and talk and write about HIV and AIDS.

Chapter One, then, explores Hoffman's *Hospital Time* as an act of mourning. Hoffman's narrative account of her mourning of Michael evokes not only Freudian

formulations of mourning, but perhaps more significantly, Jacques Derrida's theorization of "impossible mourning," mourning wherein the mourner attempts to recognize and preserve the absolute alterity of the dead other. By illustrating and narrating her mourning, Hoffman, I argue, attempts to shape the reader as a mourner. In so doing, therefore, she simultaneously theorizes mourning and reading as potential sites of activism.

In Chapter Two, I read Jarman's two-year diary, *Modern Nature*, through Derrida's "signing" of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* in *The Ear of the Other*. I suggest, like Derrida asserts of Nietzsche, that Jarman awaits the signature of the other, the reader to complete the contract of the autobiography, that is, to say Jarman to Jarman. The signature the reader gives to Jarman, however, is not only given to Jarman. Jarman, in fact, assures that we sign not only for him but also for his dead friends, those he signed for in the garden he creates at his Prospect Cottage. Thus, providing a model for the reader of what is entailed in the production of the signature for those who have died of AIDS, Jarman sculpts the reader's signature, the signature that will in turn sign for him and thereby grant him and his friends life in the reader. As a witness, in other words, Jarman understands one of his responsibilities to be the exposition of the possibility of eternal existence, "life" via the reader's interiorized presence of the writer *vis-à-vis* the text itself. The responsibility of witnessing thus also becomes the reader's.

The third and final chapter marks something of a turn in my own reading practice as I examine Peck's *Martin and John* as more of a manifestation of the responsibility as a witness to negotiate dominant culture's representations of HIV and AIDS and what we might call the dominant aesthetic of gay art or even AIDS activist art in the 1990s (Brophy 174).

Peck, I argue, proposes a kind of "middle ground," a resistance to both dominant culture's politics and AIDS activist politics by illustrating Lee Edelman's notion of the necessity of the reconstitution of the "narcissistic" gay male subject. Peck's metafictional techniques, "narcissistic narrative," to borrow from Linda Hutcheon, I argue, provide an intriguing point of intersection between the formulation of the gay male subject as "narcissistic" and the form of the novel.

This thesis, then, seeks to bring together these three diverse but similarly self-representational texts that witness AIDS to constitute a working towards a theorization of the politics of reading AIDS. By asking what the writer witnesses and manifests through these texts as his or her responsibilities in the role of the witness, I will demonstrate how these texts figure the reader in such a way that he or she cannot refuse the responsibilities of witnessing AIDS.

Chapter One

Bearing "the Unbearable Paradox of Fidelity": Strategies of Mourning in Amy Hoffman's *Hospital Time*

One of the notions upon which this thesis was formulated and subsequently one of the project's main arguments is that in texts that concern themselves with HIV and AIDS reading is figured by the writer as an activist practice. Amy Hoffman's *Hospital Time*, a purported "political memoir" (Vaid ix), is one such text. Hoffman indeed intends the act of reading to be activist. Shaped through Hoffman's mourning of Michael Riegle, a gay friend to whom she was a health-care proxy during his AIDS-related illness, our reading, however, is also intended to become a kind of mourning. Just as Derek Jarman, as we will see, provides a model of what to do with those who have died of AIDS by creating a signature that in turn sculpts the reader's own signature, Hoffman, I want to argue, constructs a narrative of mourning in which she shapes the reader as a mourner.

Such shaping is constitutive of a kind of double negotiation of what Derrida in *Mémoires for Paul de Man* calls possible and impossible mourning. On the one hand, the text itself, or more precisely Hoffman's gesture of offering an account of Michael and of her mourning of his death in the form of *Hospital Time,* is an enactment of this negotiation of possible and impossible mourning. That is, as a memoir, as Hoffman's memories of Michael, the book is necessarily an idealization of Michael, by which I mean an act of interiorization

and simplification as opposed to an act of making perfect or otherwise heroic. *Hospital Time* evidences Hoffman's mourning as interiorization, the process described by Freud as the "normal" "reaction to the loss of a loved person" (125) whereby the ego is said to incorporate the other into its own structure, taking on attributes of the other and thus sustaining or preserving the other (Freud 126; Butler, *Gender* 57). As Derrida succinctly reminds us, "Upon the death of the other we are given to memory; and thus to interiorization since the other, outside us, is now nothing" (*Mémoires* 34). The desire for such interiorization, to bear the other "in us" and therefore to constitute him[1], is in part what Derrida calls possible mourning. And while *Hospital Time* is necessarily a function of this possible mourning, it also constitutes a certain resistance to the interiorization and subsequent consumption of the other. That is, in offering an account of Michael to the reader, Hoffman makes a kind of gesture of renunciation of Michael, moving him outside of her. As a movement of renunciation (Derrida, *Mémoires* 35), this gesture, of course, is rather paradoxical. For Hoffman can only make such a gesture, give Michael to the (external) reader, because she has remembered him and thus constructed or reconstructed him through not only her mourning, but also through creating a narrative of that mourning. Nonetheless, Hoffman's impulse to make Michael external to her by producing this text mirrors one of the postulates of Derrida's impossible mourning. Derrida suggests that our greatest fidelity to the other is not our attempt to preserve him by interiorizing him, by making him a part of us, but rather is to recognize him precisely *as* other, to leave the other his alterity, to leave him outside of us (*Mémoires* 6, 21, 35). While

[1] I use the masculine pronoun "he" and the pronoun in its objective case, "him," throughout this chapter because in both *Hospital Time* and in *Mémoires* the dead person, the other with whom the writers are concerned are male.

Hoffman's offering of Michael to the reader through *Hospital Time* is not explicitly a recognition of Michael's alterity in the Derridean sense, it seems to me to approach a negotiation of the impossibility of mourning as Derrida conceptualizes it.

The text itself or the offering of a narrative account of Michael, however, is not the only means by which Hoffman negotiates possible and impossible mourning. The second part of the double negotiation to which I refer above occurs within Hoffman's own mourning. That is, Hoffman illustrates her mourning as a struggle of possible and impossible mourning or as an attempt to bear, to borrow from Derrida, "the unbearable paradox of fidelity" ("By Force" 187). That is, given to memory and, therefore, to interiorization, to "an idealizing incorporation" (Derrida, "By Force" 187) upon the death of the other, we belie the confirmation of the other as other that is evident in his death (Olberding 37). Yet the knowledge of impossible mourning, by which I mean the knowledge that the other is not accessible to the self and possesses an alterity that is uncompromised by possible or "narcissistic" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 32) mourning, necessarily frustrates our attempt to "locate a reservoir of memory of the dead as [he] was" (Olberding 37). Derrida articulates this paradox of mourning in the opening remarks of his first lecture, "Mnemosyne," in *Mémoires for Paul de Man* by asking,

> . . . where is the most unjust betrayal? Is the most distressing, or even the most deadly infidelity that of a *possible mourning* which would interiorize within us the image, idol, or ideal of the other who is dead and lives only in us? Or is that of the impossible mourning, which, leaving the other his alterity, respecting thus his infinite remove, either refuses to take or is incapable of taking the other within oneself, as in the tomb or the vault of some narcissism? (6)

In the narrative account of her mourning, Hoffman illustrates her search for a way to be "faithful" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 21, 35) to Michael, a search that traverses and negotiates

possible and impossible mourning. And it is within this negotiation or within the kind of negotiated space of the text as an act of mourning, I want to suggest, that Hoffman encourages the reader to mourn Michael.

But we must recognize that it is not simply the fact of Michael's death that prompts Hoffman's attempt to figure the reader as a mourner.[2] Rather, the attempt to create a mourner out of the reader is Hoffman's response to AIDS. I am suggesting, in other words, that Hoffman would not have written *Hospital Time* if Michael had of not died *of AIDS*. She, in fact, implies this much in response to a question she asks herself:

> What if there were no AIDS? . . . Mike would merely be my friend, my old, difficult friend. I wouldn't think of him every day as I do now, still. I wouldn't carry him around like a flame I dare not let gutter. He wouldn't approve of the way I'm living these days . . . He wouldn't like this writing I'm doing about him. (77-78)

Thus, it seems that Hoffman proposes mourning as a means by which the reader can come to recognize the impact of AIDS, the "intrusion" of "pain and death" into "our normal little lives and relationships" (77).

In this chapter, then, I will examine Hoffman's mourning as the negotiation of possible and impossible mourning and the subsequent shaping of the reader as mourner. I will demonstrate how Hoffman configures her own mourning not only to evoke mourning in the reader, but in so doing also to imply that reading mourning is a potentially activist response

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[2] My contention that the death of a loved one in itself does not warrant or produce in the writer the impulse to turn the reader into a mourner is not meant as a general characterization of the relationship between the writer of an account of mourning and the reader. It does, however, raise questions of a more general nature about the boundary between reading an account of mourning and enacting one's own mourning. At what point does reading an account of mourning become mourning or does it necessarily? It is in part this question with which I am concerned in this chapter.

to AIDS. I conclude the chapter with what is meant to be something of an evaluative question. As a kind of assessment of Hoffman's strategies of mourning I ask, having read *Hospital Time*, am I mourning now?[3]

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Everything remains "in me" or "in us," "between us," upon the death of the other. Everything is entrusted *to me*; everything is bequeathed or given *to us*, and first of all *to* what I call memory - *to the memory*, the place of this strange dative. All we seem to have left is memory, since nothing appears able to come to us any longer, nothing is coming or to come, from the other to the present. This is probably true, but is this truth true, or true enough?

- Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires for Paul de Man* 32-33

In many ways the "probabl[e] truth" that Derrida describes in this passage, possible mourning as the survivor's recognition that the other can only exist "in me," dwelling in memory, is the "truth" to which Hoffman subscribes. Or more accurately, it is the "truth" to

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[3] Perhaps the most accurate response to this question would be another question: Am I ever not mourning? To which the answer, according the rhetoric of mourning as postulated by Derrida, *must* be "no." This "no" can be explicated several ways. It is perhaps best explained by the assertion that the distance or lack experienced in mourning does not begin with the event of death (Dunn 369; Derrida, *Mémoires* 29). There exists even between living friends a distance that prevents one from knowing the other as a complete presence (Dunn 369). Not only is knowing another as a complete presence an impossibility, however. It is also impossible for the individual to "experience his or her self-presence" (Dunn 370). As Derrida explains, ". . . *we* are never *ourselves*, and between us, identical to us, a 'self' is never in itself or identical to itself" (*Mémoires* 28). According to this formulation, then, the living friend is always already experienced as the memory or as "the trace of the other" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 29) who therefore can never be "fully recollected or habilitated in anyone's self-reflection" (Dunn 370). It is precisely that knowledge that the friend has always been a "trace of memory" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 29) that "would have allowed [us] to" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 29) mourn the friend *before* the friend's death (Derrida, *Mémoires* 29). In asking the question "am I mourning now?", however, I mean to ask, am I mourning Michael? Am I mourning those who have died of AIDS?

which Hoffman *wants* to subscribe. That is, Hoffman wants to believe not only in the necessity of memory, but also in the fidelity of memory. For Hoffman this "truth" in part entails the Freudian formulation of the interiorization of the other. At several points in *Hospital Time*, in fact, Hoffman's explanations of memory and, therefore, of what happens to Michael via the memory narrated in this memoir have Freudian echoes. The passage I quoted above in which Hoffman responds to the question, "what if there were no AIDS?" (77) is one of the most illustrative examples of not only this Freudian echo, but also of Hoffman's understanding of what constitutes her mourning of Michael. The response Hoffman gives to this question, then, bears repeating: "I wouldn't think of him every day as I do now, still. I wouldn't carry him around like a flame I dare not let gutter.[4] . . . Since the moment he died, I've taken him everywhere with me" (78). Hoffman's proclamation that she has taken Michael everywhere with her since his death, I hardly need to point out, is an explicit articulation of the interiorization enacted in her mourning. Clearly, Hoffman accepts the schema of interiorization thematized by mourning. Michael is with(in) her. She has taken him with(in) her in mourning. The other two sentences I have quoted here, however, notably identify not the "moment" of death as the point from which interiorization begins, but rather, as answers to the question "what if there were no AIDS?" they identify AIDS as the event

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[4] I find Hoffman's choice of metaphor here particularly striking in light of (pun not intended) Derrida's description of the "nothingness" of what is left of the other: ". . . in light of this incinerating blaze where nothingness appears, we remain in *disbelief* itself. For never will we believe in either death or immortality; and we sustain the blaze of this terrible light through devotion, for it would be unfaithful to delude oneself into believing that the other living *in us* is living *in himself*: because he lives *in us* and because we live this or that in his memory, in memory of him" (*Mémoires* 21). Can we compare Hoffman's "flame" to Derrida's "blaze?" Do both figure memory the same way? And what is it about this trope that both writers find particularly relevant or useful to their explications of memory and mourning?

with which interiorization, and, therefore, mourning begins. We might suggest that this figuring of AIDS as a kind of moment with which interiorization begins is necessarily an equation of AIDS with death. AIDS does not merely make manifest the possibility of death, after all; it makes manifest the imminence of death and thus puts in place the mechanisms of mourning. Nonetheless, the sentiment expressed in these statements parallels Hoffman's ultimate declaration of her mourning as interiorization in "tak[ing] [Michael] everywhere with her" (78). She "carries" Michael around with her in "thinking" about him "every day," in remembering him. For Derrida, this Freudian interiorization is, notably, "the origin of fiction":

> Memory and interiorization: since Freud, this is how the 'normal' 'work of mourning' is often described. It entails a movement in which an interiorizing idealization takes in itself or upon itself the body and voice of the other, the other's visage and person, ideally *and* quasi-literally devouring them. This mimetic interiorization is not fictive; it is the origin of fiction, of apocryphal figuration. (*Mémoires* 34)

What can Derrida's description of interiorization as "the origin of fiction" mean to Hoffman as she narrates mourning and Michael? Moreover, what does it mean for the reader, an observer of this interiorization who is in some ways meant to mimic Hoffman's mourning? With this contention, Derrida begins to evoke the question of fidelity to the other. In "devouring" the other, creating an "apocryphal figuration," one threatens the alterity of the other. The other in this possible mourning becomes, paradoxically, more accessible and present to the survivor after death as his "alterity becomes subsumed under the 'mineness' of memory" (Olberding 37). At times, this theorization of interiorization accurately describes both Hoffman's mourning and the text itself as an act of mourning. Near the end of the book in a section entitled "Mike's Dick," Hoffman narrates the events of a dinner party, which

include her encounter with a man named Larry who used to "trick . . . [u]p in the bathroom" (145) at the *Gay Community News* office with Michael. Larry describes Mike's dick much to the fascination of the guests who beckon Hoffman to include the details in the book: "Everyone in the room is looking at me significantly. 'Hey, Aim, this is great! This has to go in the book!' I've become known as a Mike specialist, a Mike collector. As I write, I create him, and *he's mine, all mine*, all his deeds and effects" (emphasis mine; 145). On the one hand, this passage is exemplary of the "'mineness' of memory" (Olberding 37) and the threat posed by Hoffman's memory of Michael to his alterity. If he is "all mine," how can he be "Michael?" Hoffman's assertion of her possession of Michael here is a particularly resonant statement, especially as it comes at the end of the book. It suggests to the reader that what we have read, or rather who we have read about, is not Michael, but is, in many ways, Hoffman herself in the figure of who she constructs as Michael. In Derridean terms, Hoffman's proclamation evidences the "failure" of "successful" or possible mourning (*Mémoires* 34-5). That is, "faithful interiorization" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 35), which "bears the other and constitutes him . . . in us" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 35) makes the other part of us and "then the other no longer quite seems to be the other" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 35). Instead what we are left with is a kind of "mirror of the mourner's self" (Dunn 369).

On the other hand, this strange possession might be understood as something of a reversed interiorization. That is, while Michael belongs to Hoffman, this proclamation seems to indicate that there is nothing left of her that is not Michael. It is as if her interiorization of him as turned her inside out. This declaration of possession, then, most intriguingly presents the possibility of the complete negation of the alterity of both the mourner and the mourned.

On the one hand, there seems to be nothing left of Michael; yet "Michael" (the quotation marks imply that I am not referring to Michael physically incarnate but to the memory of him) seems to dispossess Hoffman. The possibility of reworking the paradigms of mourning, then, seems to be at work in this instance.

Also significant in this passage is Hoffman's mention of the act of writing. In ascribing to writing the ability to "create" Michael, Hoffman implicates writing in the act of memory as well as in the process of interiorization. Writing, like memory, in other words, poses a threat to the alterity of the other. Writing the other may approach the "unfaithful" "delusion" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 21) of believing "that the other living *in us* [and/or in the text] is living *in himself* because he lives *in us* and because we live [or write] this or that in his memory, in memory of him" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 21).

Furthermore, Hoffman's description of herself as a "Mike collector" resounds in the conceptualization of possible mourning as the constitution of "parts" of the other inside the mourner. As Derrida explains,

> The movement of interiorization keeps within us the life, thought, body, voice, look or soul of the other, but in the form of those hypomnemata, memoranda, signs or symbols, images of mnesic representations which are only lacunary fragments, detached and dispersed - only 'parts' of the departed other. In turn they are parts of us, included 'in us' in a memory which suddenly seems greater *than* this other that the memory harbors and guards within it, but also greater *with* this other, greater than itself, inadequate to itself, pregnant with this other. (37)

Read in conjunction with this formulation of the movement of interiorization, Hoffman's self-description as a "Mike collector" potentially refigures her apparent proclamation of possession as a not a claim or prerogative according to the mourning she is performing, but as an acknowledgment of the "failure" of mourning as interiorization. That is, because

Hoffman acknowledges her memory here as a "collection" of Michael, as "memoranda," we can read "he's mine, all mine" not as an intended result of her memory and the memoir, but as the recognition of the potential for her mourning to erase Michael's alterity. We might suggest, then, that more than evidencing a kind of interiorization of Michael in making comments such as "he's all mine," Hoffman recognizes the illusory functions of possible mourning.

The phrase "Mike collector," however, is also notably an appropriate description of the text itself. After all, Hoffman uses the expression "Mike collector" in direct reference to her writing "the book": "'This has to go in the book!' I've become known as . . a Mike Collector" (145). The implication here, in other words, is that the book is the eventual site of Hoffman's "Mike Collection." Yet, as an act of mourning we recognize that Hoffman's collecting and, subsequently the book, can never be a faithful and entire re-collection of Michael. On the other hand, attributing the status of "Mike collector" to this memoir also draws attention to ways the book must exceed such a description. That is, the book cannot only be a collection of Michael's characteristics or delineations of his actions. It must invite the reader in some way to value such a collection and it does so, I would suggest, through its figurations of mourning.

Returning, then, to Hoffman's own descriptions of mourning, I want to examine an earlier scene in which Hoffman describes an argument she has with "this towering butch" (104) at a memorial service for Bob, one of her friends who died of AIDS. The "butch"

> got up to the mike and claimed that while Bob was convulsing in the hospital, she was splitting logs with an axe or some such Maine woods chore. Suddenly all the leaves on the tree beside her fell at her feet in a heap. She swears there was no breeze. She

> believes in this heap of leaves as an actual emanation from Bob's soul as it left the earth. (104)

Hoffman responds with another Freudian theorization of mourning,

> But it was March, wasn't it? Of the proverbial winds? Of the naked gray branches? And the way I heard it, he died in the dead of night.
>
> If it comforts you, okay, I told her, but I only believe in memory. You carry the person within you, and thus he lives, as part of you and yours. (104)

Again, the reader is presented with a description of mourning that is meant to reflect Hoffman's strategies of mourning and the mourning enacted by Hoffman through the text. The strategy she describes here, which we might characterize again as "faithful interiorization[,] bear[ing] the other and constitut[ing] him in me (in us), at once living and dead [that] makes the other a part of us" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 35), however, is an oversimplification of the memory and mourning demonstrated by Hoffman. Thus, she continues, "Too bad my memory is full of big holes. Pits, faults, abysses, volcanoes. I knew Bob healthy for ten years, but I only remember him sick. Sometimes I hardly remember him at all" (104). The "big holes" in Hoffman's memory parallel the "lacunary fragments" of Derrida's theorization of the movement of interiorization. For Hoffman, they signal the inadequacies or inaccuracies of interiorization. Furthermore, that Hoffman admits to remembering Bob only as sick gestures to the reader that similar "holes" constitute Hoffman's as well as our account of Michael.

In addition to contributing to our understanding of the theorization of mourning, these "holes" and what *is* remembered also suggests something to us about the paradoxical way AIDS figures memory. While Hoffman signals the inadequacy of interiorization by acknowledging the "holes" in her memory, she also, it seems to me, wants to offer AIDS as

a reason for these "holes." The severity of AIDS, its devastation of the physical and mental capabilities of those inflicted by it, make her remember Bob only in sickness. But if this is the case, why does she "sometimes hardly remember him at all" (104)? The answer Hoffman provides again is "because of AIDS." She seems to attribute to AIDS the production of those blank spaces, those missing portions, "lacunary fragments."

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Up to this point, then, most of what we have seen of Hoffman's strategies of mourning are articulations of interiorization and thus of possible mourning. For the most part, Hoffman seems to value interiorization not solely as recompense for loss, but also to "faithfully" preserve the other. Yet there exists simultaneously in the text an impulse to allow Michael his alterity. Near the end of the book, for example, Hoffman writes, "From the very beginning I saw him, Michael, in all his Michaelness, and I never lost sight of that no matter what, and I think that is love" (142). To recognize the other in his otherness, "Michael in all his Michaelness"[5] (142) is what Derrida calls "an aborted interiorization," a "movement of renunciation which leaves the other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us" (*Mémoires* 35). Such renunciation is the basis of the notion of impossible mourning. Yet impossible mourning is impossible precisely because we cannot remember the dead as pure alterity. Realizing the other as other - a recognition that is not dependent on the event of

[5] "Michaelness" does not signal only alterity or singularity, however. We must recall Derrida's "But *we* are never *ourselves*, and between us, identical to us, a 'self' is never in itself or identical to itself" (*Mémoires* 28). "Michaelness," thus, signifies Michael's difference from himself, the impossibility of self-presence.

death - then, means that the other can be neither internalized nor accessed. Hoffman's assertion that she "never lost sight" of Michael's alterity is not only a profession of her attempt to be "faithful" to Michael in mourning, but also is an invitation for the reader to examine how she maintains the sense of Michael's alterity through the much-valued possible mourning. Two of the most interesting sites of the negotiation of possible and impossible mourning occur, in fact, in what we most commonly recognize as ritual or conventional practices associated with mourning and the narration of mourning. Hoffman uses, first, "the moment of death" (77) and, second, the memorial service as spaces for the negotiation or potential intersection of possible and impossible mourning.

The moment of what Derrida would call Michael's "real" death is not physically witnessed, that is, seen by Hoffman. She, nonetheless, constructs a narrative of the moment:

> In my memory, in my writing, I circle around it like a hawk riding a thermal. I close in upon it, but unlike the hawk, I never plunge. The moment of death. Here it is.
>
> Friday evening. I'd been at the hospital all afternoon, and Roberta and I were going out to dinner. Our coats were on. One of us had her hand upon the doorknob, about to turn it, and the phone rang. 'I'll get it,' I said, out of habit, not because I thought it might be the ultimate call. I was going out to dinner. I wasn't thinking about death. Or, rather, I knew it was close, that it could happen any second, but I wasn't thinking that it might be *now* or *now* or *now* - this second.
>
> 'His breathing had been getting more and more difficult,' said Rob. 'He was really straining. But then, about ten minutes before it happened, his breathing eased. People were here, around the bed. He opened his eyes and looked at us, he sighed. And that was the end. We waited, but he didn't breathe in again. Michael died peacefully, Amy, I want you to know that.'
>
> Peacefully. If you want to believe that, go ahead.
>
> 'The hospital wants to know what to do with him,' Rob went on. 'Can you come down here?'
>
> And that was it. Over. I hung up the phone. I waited to see if I would cry.
>
> How do I feel? I asked myself. Kind of hollow. (77)

One of the most interesting things about Hoffman's description of the moment of Michael's death is that it constitutes a double narrative, a narrative within a narrative. Hoffman begins

by telling us, in another notable equation of memory with writing - "in my memory, in my writing" - that she is about to recount "the moment of death" (77). In so doing, however, she not only relates the narrative of Michael's death, which was narrated to her, but also recounts what *she* was doing as implicitly constitutive of "the moment of death." She includes herself in the moment of Michael's "real" death despite not being with him. Such an inclusion in this narrative moment is significant in terms of the impossibility of mourning in that the recognition of impossibility also offers to the mourner an understanding of the "in me" on which the possibility of mourning depends. As Derrida explains,

> The 'me' or the 'us' of which we speak then arise and are delimited in the way they are only through this experience of the other, and of the other as the other who can die, leaving in me or in us this memory of the other. This terrible solitude which is mine or ours at the death of the other is what constitutes that relationship to self which we call 'me,' 'us,' 'between us,' 'subjectivity,' 'intersubjectivity,' 'memory.' The *possibility* of death 'happens,' so to speak, 'before' these different instances, and makes them possible. Or, more precisely, the *possibility* of death of the other *as* mine or ours in-forms any relation to the other and the finitude of memory. (*Mémoires* 33)

The self, then, comes to the self through "the limit recognized by the 'in me' of memory only evident in the death of the other" (Olberding 37). Thus, we might suggest that this narrative of the moment of Michael's death allows Hoffman a kind coming to herself. The questions she asks herself and the answers she gives to them are befitting to this notion: "How do I feel? I asked myself. Kind of *hollow*" (emphasis mine; 77). Feeling "kind of *hollow*," echo-filled but nonetheless empty, Hoffman realizes that the "in me" of memory "omits to preserve the otherness" (Olberding 37) that distinguishes the other. All that can be interiorized in impossible mourning, therefore, is absence, "hollowness" entailed by death and that which is entailed in the relation of one self to another (Olberding 37). But is this moment transferable

to the reader as well? That is, in reading this account of death, are we too granted the understanding of "in me"?

The reader is most visibly strategized by Hoffman here, however, in her use of the second-person address. Hoffman's protest against the representation of Michael's death that is narrated to her – "If you want to believe that, go ahead" (77) – not only points to the constructedness of narrative (a self-reflexive gesture as well one hopes), but also makes explicit the reader's role in producing or reproducing strategies of mourning. That is, Hoffman's "if you want to believe that, go ahead" (77) echoes her response to the self-conciliatory narrative told by the "towering butch" (104) at Bob's memorial service – "If it comforts you, okay . . . but I only believe in memory" (104). Thus, Hoffman appears to offer simultaneously two strategies of mourning in evoking the reader here: the first, which she figures herself as writing against, is the construction of self-comforting narratives such as the "peaceful death" and the flight of Bob's soul through the leaves. In opposition to these kinds of narratives, Hoffman offers memory and therefore interiorization in her protest of Rob's account of Michael's death. Yet as her own narrative account of Michael's death illustrates, memory and interiorization cannot be separated from these kinds of narratives – "In my memory, in my writing," she writes. The reader, therefore, is asked to engage once again in the question of the fidelity of possible mourning.

The chapter in which Hoffman recollects Michael's memorial service also negotiates notions of possible and impossible mourning on several levels. Hoffman tells us that she

> wanted nothing to do with a memorial service. My philosophy was that when Mike died my responsibility ended, and you know what? I used to think about that when he was alive. I dreamed of the day when I would have no contact with Mike's

> remains, his possessions, or his associates. Of course it didn't happen that way. I ended up with the ashes. In ashes begin more responsibilities.
>
> They were heavy. (85)

The contradictions between the notions evoked in this passage and the overall work of the book are striking. Rather paradoxically, Hoffman's "philosophy" during Michael's illness that her responsibility ended upon his death foregrounds the memoir's work as a response to that death and thus as an illustration of the *respons*ibility manifested by Michael's death. Another similar contradiction appears in Hoffman's belief that there could be a "day when [she] would have no contact with Mike's remains" (85). Given Hoffman's abundant representations of possible mourning and interiorization, the notion that she might some day "have no contact with Mike's remains" may at first seem inappropriate. If we take possible mourning to its Freudian conclusion, that is, to the point at which, after an amount of time, "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud 126), however, we can understand Hoffman's "dream" for the day the "responsibility ended" as a wish for the illusory "successful" mourning. In Michael's ashes Hoffman realizes this "dream" as just that – a dream – and continues her role as a respondent to Michael and now to his death.

Later on in the chapter Hoffman describes her role in the memorial service:

> How did the box [of Mike's ashes] get to the memorial service? . . . I must have dragged behind me the lily bag and in it the box. I must have held it on my lap in the backseat as we drove and carried it down the street to the site on a path through the Fenway reeds.
>
> Because I had the box, the memorial service could start only upon my arrival. In the lily bag I had brought *Leaves of Grass* – the last book Michael read – and a clamshell to scoop the ashes with – something natural, from the Sea, as he would have wanted. At the appropriate moment I read a few lines, and I took the clamshell and plunged it into the box. I flung the ashes onto the path where we, the survivors, and at night, intrepid gay men, ready for a tryst no matter what the season, would tread on them. I didn't fling the ashes into the path on purpose, but they didn't scatter as

> far as I thought they would. . . . On the way back to the car I threw the lily bag into a municipal litter basket. (86-7)

Hoffman's role as the one who enables the memorial service to start because she is in possession of Mike's ashes, I want to suggest, parallels the role the text sets up for the reader. In possession now of this (re)collection of Michael in the form of the memoir, no matter how impossible or fragmentary such a (re)collection is, the reader must initiate this kind of "memorial service" by the very act of reading. Thus begins the reader's mourning. As Derrida asserts, "one cannot hold a discourse *on* the 'work of mourning' without taking part in it" ("By Force" 172). Derrida takes this notion further, in fact, by asserting that

> all work is the work of mourning. All work in general works *at mourning*. In and of itself. Even when it has the power to give birth, even and especially when it plans to bring something to light and be seen. The work of mourning is not one kind of work among other possible kinds; an activity of the kind 'work' is by no means a specific figure for production in general.
>
> There is thus no metalanguage for the language in which a work of mourning is at work. This is also why one should not be able to say anything about the work of mourning, anything about this subject, since it cannot become a theme, only another experience of mourning that comes to work over the one who intends to speak. To speak of mourning or of anything else. And that is why whoever thus works *at* the work of mourning learns the impossible – and that mourning is interminable. Inconsolable. Irreconcilable. ("By Force" 172)[6]

How do texts such as *Hospital Time*, however, *not* thematize mourning? What implications does Derrida's notion that "all work is the work of mourning" have on the intended effect of a text to produce a mourner? Furthermore, how are Derrida's notions of interminable mourning reflected in this text and in AIDS?

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[6] This is not the first place Derrida makes such an assertion. See, for example, note 3 in "Injunctions of Marx" in *Spectres of Marx* in which he describes the chapter as "pursu[ing] earlier paths: around the work of mourning that would be coextensive with all work in general" (178).

To begin to address these questions, we need to recognize that Hoffman's various strategies of mourning remind the reader that he or she cannot refuse the dead. This "reminder" in itself constitutes Hoffman's activist intention as well as the activist potential of reading. In a culture that refuses to publically acknowledge and, therefore, mourn AIDS deaths and the loss of homosexual attachment (Butler, *Psychic Life* 132), Hoffman shapes a reader who must acknowledge and respond to Michael's death. Allow me to revisit part of the epigraph with which I began this chapter's first section: "Everything remains 'in me' or 'in us,' 'between us,' upon the death of the other. Everything is entrusted *to me*; everything is bequeathed or given *to us*" (Derrida, *Mémoires* 33). The dead, in other words, are given to us. In reading Hoffman's strategies of mourning, we cannot refuse to mourn them.

Chapter Two

"Behold the (gay, HIV-positive) man!": Derek Jarman's *Modern Nature* and the "Keen-enough Ear"

> [W]e are all looked at (each one of us singularly) by the one who, with each page, will have providentially deciphered and prescribed, arranged in advance, a reading of what is happening here, of what makes the present scene possible, foreseeing and watching over it with the benevolent regard (since it is he who watches out to watch over us) and with all the love of someone who can say, at the moment of dying, even if he is not Christ or even Christian, *hoc est meum corpus, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me* (Luke 22:19).
>
> – Jacques Derrida, "By Force of Mourning" 189

With the title of this chapter, an allusion to Friedrich Nietzsche's autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, and, by implication, to Pilate's announcement of Jesus to the Jews in the Gospel of John, I propose an alternate name for Derek Jarman's *Modern Nature*. *Modern Nature*, Jarman's two-year diary can be aptly retitled *Ecce Homo*: "Behold the man!" "Behold the man facing his crucifixion!" "Behold the gay, HIV-positive man!" That Christ and Nietzsche are simultaneously evoked by this title is befitting to Jarman's diary and to the relationship he establishes with the reader. Both Nietzsche and Jarman compare themselves to Christ. Nietzsche makes the comparison in the very act of naming his autobiography *Ecce Homo*, while Jarman compares himself to Christ in creating for himself a prominent role within Christian iconography. Specifically, Jarman figures himself in his garden, where, like Christ as he wears the crown of thorns while Pilate leads him out to the Jews (John 19:1-2), he is profoundly aware of the imminence of his own death but promises life for the dead. His

garden, Jarman tells us, is a "memorial" (55), "built for dear friends" (178) who have died of AIDS. But more than a memorial, the garden is a text through which Jarman assures that his dead friends live as spectres haunting not only Jarman but also the reader. It is a place in which Jarman, to borrow from Jacques Derrida's reading of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* in *The Ear of the Other*, gives a "signature"[1] to those who no longer have or perhaps never had a voice. Like Nietzsche, who proclaims that the "fortunateness of [his] existence . . . lies in its fatality" (*Ecce Homo* 8), which he expresses as being already dead as his father and still alive as his mother (8), Jarman also "writes for the dead" (Derrida, *Ear* 53). That is, because he understands and portrays himself as the gay, HIV-positive man already dead[2] and still alive, Jarman can at once sign for the dead, constitute the *autos* of their autobiography, to paraphrase Derrida (*Ear* 50), and call for them to sign his name. The garden figures as the ideal trope for this complicated relationship; because Jarman creates the garden, giving life to his dead friends (giving them a signature), after his own death, the garden and the dead living friends constitute Jarman's life (signing with him). Life is the interiorized presence of

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[1] The signature, in Derridean terms, is not a name (Kamuf 12). Rather, as Geoffrey Bennington explains, the signature *should* mark "in writing what is marked in speech by enunciation itself" (153), that is, the "I-here-now" (Bennington 150) that is lost in the complex temporality of writing (Bennington 153). But the present marked by a signature "is immediately divided by the necessary possibility of its repetition" (Bennington 156). The signature must be at once always unique but also infinitely reproducible. The signature, thus, is constituted by the promise of what Bennington calls a "countersignature" or another signature produced in a kind of response and relation to the "first signature."

[2] I do not mean to suggest that people with HIV are already dead. Rather, my characterization of Jarman as "already dead" is meant to mirror Nietzsche's understanding of his life through his death as well as his understanding of himself as a product of his father's being dead and his mother's being alive. Jarman is "already dead" as his friends who have died of AIDS.

the dead, constituted by the production of the signature; the signature here being the completed contract between the dead (author) and living (reader).

What is so intriguing about this relationship as Jarman has constructed it is that it is paralleled by the act of his writing *Modern Nature*. Just as Jarman assures that the garden gives life to his dead friends through his signature, he writes the diary to assure that the reader signs for him. Telling the story of his life, notably often through narration of the growth and destruction of the garden, Jarman, like Nietzsche, entrusts his signature to the other. As Derrida explains,

> In some way the signature will take place on the addressee's side, that is, on the side of him or her whose ear will be keen enough to hear my name, for example, to understand my signature, that with which I sign. . . . The ear of the other says me to me and constitutes the *autos* of my autobiography. When, much later, the other will have perceived with a keen-enough ear what I will have addressed or destined to him or her, then my signature will have taken place. (*Ear* 50-1)

It is the reader, in other words, who has to honour Jarman's signature by "interpreting his message . . . On this condition, the signature contract and the autobiography will take place" (Derrida, *Ear* 51). That "it is the ear of the other that signs" (Derrida, *Ear* 51) for Jarman is, of course, not unique to either Jarman's text, or as Derrida points out, to Nietzsche's text (51). Derrida notes: "Every text answers to this structure. It is the structure of textuality in general. A text is signed only much later by the other. And this testamentary structure doesn't befall a text as if by accident, but constructs it. This is how a text always comes about" (*Ear* 51). That "every text answers to this structure" (Derrida, *Ear* 51), however, does not lessen the importance of Jarman's *intention* to have the reader sign, to hear and to understand him. Producing the signature, producing "the whole of active interpretation"

(Derrida, *Ear* 52), as he does for the dead and as he asks us to do for him, is both Jarman's and the reader's activist practice. Thus, how Jarman figures his intention to have the reader sign for and with him is of import. How does Jarman shape a "keen-enough ear" (Derrida, *Ear* 51)? How does he model the reader in such a way that his or her reading of the diary is an activist event? What I want to theorize in this chapter, then, is the activist potential of the signature as Jarman figures it through the diary narration of his life story as a gay man with HIV. As I have suggested, he establishes a model of what to do with the dead and of what giving them a signature entails. In his garden, in which he is the Creator and Savior, alive eternally and already dead, Jarman demonstrates how he produces a signature for his dead friends. Incorporated into the diary, however, this signature becomes another text for the reader to sign. Jarman, in other words, uses the diary to assure that we too sign for his dead friends. Thus, I want to suggest that the signature he performs via the garden is intended to mold the signature we produce for him. Or, more precisely, it is intended to mold *how* we produce the signature, how we "interpret his message" (Derrida, *Ear* 51). The garden, I will demonstrate, is one of the most significant and complicated of many signposts, if you will, that Jarman uses to shape our production of the eventual signature. Reading Jarman's diary largely but not exclusively through the trope of the garden, I will trace the development of both the "message" (Derrida, *Ear* 50) of Jarman's diary or, of his life story, and the ear that is "keen enough" to hear that "message."

This chapter, then, unfolds in two sections that revolve around a "state of being" in the garden, by which I mean the condition of the contents of the garden as well as Jarman's physical location – his absence or presence – in the garden. The first section begins by

following Jarman into *Modern Nature* – his diary and the landscape that surrounds him at his Prospect Cottage in Dungeness, England. Early on in the diary, amid juxtaposed descriptions of the landscape's desolation and the garden's abundance, Jarman notes his birthday. Like Nietzsche's introduction to *Ecce Homo*, which he dates with his birthday, Jarman's mention of the anniversary of his birthday evokes notions of the eternal return. Read alongside several other key entries in which Jarman subtly "reaffirms what has occurred during . . . [his life] as having been good and as bound to return eternally, immortally" (Derrida, *Ear* 13), I will explore the eternal return as a recurrent and multifarious motif in Jarman's diary, a motif that is foundational to both the signature he gives to his dead friends via the garden as well as the signature he intends the reader to produce for him. I will take up the question of what it means for Jarman to advocate the eternal return in the face of the devastation of AIDS. The second section entails an exploration of the garden as the model of what to do with the dead or as how to produce a signature for the dead. Thus, this section constitutes further description of Jarman's roles in the garden as well as a comparison of the garden as a signed text to the diary itself as a signed text. Is the garden a kind of mirror with which to examine and evaluate the signature(s) produced by reading the diary?

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On this perfect day, when everything has become ripe and not only the grapes are growing brown, a ray of sunlight has fallen onto my life: I look behind me, I look before me, never have I seen so many and such good things together. Not in vain have I buried my forty-fourth year today, I was *entitled* to bury it - what there was of life in it is rescued, is immortal. The first book of the *Revaluation of all Values*, the *Songs of Zarathustra*, the Twilight of Idols, my attempt to philosophize with a hammer - all of them gifts of this year, of its last quarter even! *How should I not be grateful to my whole life?* - And so I tell myself my life.

- Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*

Page one of Jarman's diary reads: "1989." The first entry, which grants the reader access to Jarman's garden and to the life he tells, appears beneath the heading, "JANUARY" and below a smaller heading that reads "*Sunday 1*." That Jarman begins the record of his life on the first day of the year (according to the Roman calendar), is perhaps in itself an interesting trope. What can it mean to begin the recording and telling of one's life on "New Year's Day" – the moment when the year calendarically "annuls itself and begins anew" (Derrida, *Ear* 11)? "To date is to sign," asserts Derrida in partial explication of Nietzsche's work in the above epigraph. "And to 'date from' is also to indicate the place of the signature" (Derrida, *Ear* 11). But "to date" is also to fulfill a major formal convention of the diary. Given that every page of Jarman's 314-page diary is dated, are we to understand each page and each separately dated diary entry as a distinct "place of the signature"? Or are we to take Sunday, January 1, 1989 as the "'date from'" which Jarman intends to "indicate the place of the signature" (Derrida, *Ear* 11)? Or, to think this question through Nietzsche's use of the date, does Jarman, like Nietzsche, figure the "today" as a moment of simultaneous annulment and renewal of his life? Does "*Sunday 1*" (3) evoke the eternal return that Nietzsche derives from "today," his birthday? That Jarman fails to associate "*Sunday 1*" (3) in any way with the "new year" in this first diary entry is our primary clue to such questions. He uses this initial entry, in fact, more to orient the reader to the physicality of the surrounding landscape than to indicate a kind of temporal place of the signature:

> Prospect Cottage, its timbers black with pitch, stands on the shingle at Dungeness. . . . Prospect faces the rising sun across a road sparkling silver with sea mist. One small clump of dark green broom breaks through the flat ochre shingle. . . .
>
> There are no walls or fences. My garden's boundaries are the horizon. . . .

> There is more sunlight here than anywhere in Britain; this and the constant wind turn the shingle into a stony desert where only the toughest grasses take a hold – paving the way for sage-green sea kale, blue bugloss, red poppy, yellow sedum. (3)

This introductory description of the landscape is meant to shape our later reading of the garden as the place of Jarman's signature. Jarman gives the reader a kind of "before my signature" picture here as he describes the conditions in which he creates and nurtures the life of the garden. And that "only the toughest"(3) can live in this environment and under such harsh conditions is also a condition not lost as a metaphor for Jarman's own life. Thus, we might suggest that Jarman indeed offers "the place of the signature" (Derrida, *Ear* 11) in these opening remarks, but that it is not his intention to use "*Sunday 1*" (Jarman 3) as an indication of this "place."

This is not to say, however, that Jarman does not "indicate the place of the signature" (Derrida, *Ear* 11) through a date. He, in fact, "'dates from'" two "places." First, using tropes similar to the ones employed by Nietzsche in this section's epigraph, Jarman "indicates the place of the signature" as his birthday. Later in the diary, he describes December 22 as an anniversary (208). The day of Jarman's HIV test, December 22 is the second date from and with which Jarman produces a site of the signature. Each date and subsequent "place of the signature" is integral to Jarman's shaping of the "keen-enough" reader. Jarman's birthday functions more to put in place the motif of the eternal return while his description of the day of his HIV test as an "anniversary" has greater implications for how we are meant to read his attitudes toward life with HIV.

Jarman's seventh diary entry, which constitutes only the fourth page of written text, is dated by his birthday:

> *Tuesday 31*
> My 47th birthday.
> The sea mist cleared leaving a bright sunny day. As I walked round the garden a lark was singing. In front of the house the crocuses are blooming and the daffodils are in bud. The roses are already breaking into leaf. One of the rosemary bushes is in flower, and the globular seeds of the sea kale have germinated.
>
> I spent an hour after lunch sitting in the sun with only a pullover – something I have never done on my birthday, which has always been a cold, grey day.
>
> ~
>
> Planted a handful of sea kale seedlings about the garden, they grow rapidly, making luxurious plants within a year; large grey-green leaves catch the summer dew like pearls; their perfection untouched by predatory caterpillars. . . . At this time of the year they are nearly invisible, but if you look closely they are already sprouting their sturdy purple leaves. By April they will have turned a glaucous green, which in turn will be submerged in June by a froth of white flowers. (6)

As is the case with Nietzsche, who was also ill while he wrote his autobiography[3], Jarman's observation or statement of his birthday subtly invokes his illness and the fatality he associates with it. But, also like Nietzsche, he uses his birthday, in conjunction with other motifs in this passage, as a kind of trope to turn death around on itself. Derrida's explication of Nietzsche's evocation of the eternal return is particularly useful in directing us to Jarman's parallel gesture in his birthday entry. For this reason, I want to navigate my reading of Jarman first through Derrida's "signing" of Nietzsche's text.

Derrida begins his reading of what he calls Nietzsche's "exergue" (*Ear* 11), (the passage I use as an epigraph, which is a strangely unpaginated page that occurs between the

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[3] There exists amongst critics debate over Nietzsche's "state of mind" at the time of his writing *Ecce Homo*. It is not necessary to my thesis that I take up the question of whether or not Nietzsche was "mad" when he wrote this book. When I refer to his illness, therefore, I refer generally to the incredible thirty-three year period (1867-1900) in which he was in some way or another affected by syphilis ("Chronology of Nietzsche's Life" xxii, Penguin Ed. *Ecce Homo*).

Foreword and the first chapter of *Ecce Homo*), with the assertion that by dating this page with his birthday Nietzsche "indicates the place of the signature" (*Ear* 11). But what is this "place" and exactly how is it "indicated?" The anniversary, explains Derrida, "is the moment when the year turns back on itself, forms a ring or annulus with itself, annuls itself and begins anew" (*Ear* 11). As the anniversary of his birth (and necessarily of his death, of the day he began dying), Nietzsche's, as well as Jarman's, birthday signals this kind of simultaneous effacement or burial of the year or years that have passed and beginning of the same annual cycle. At this moment, then, "one can look forward and backward at one and the same time" (Derrida, *Ear* 12): "I look behind me, I look before me, never have I seen so many and such good things together" (Nietzsche unpaginated).[4] Nietzsche, as we have read, goes on to assert that he has "buried [his] forty-fourth year today" and in so doing "rescued" and made "immortal" "what there was of life in it." Derrida interprets these remarks as Nietzsche's burial not simply of his past forty-four years, but rather of death, "and in burying death he has saved life - and immortality" (*Ear* 12). What enables Nietzsche to bury death and save life is what Derrida refers to as "affirmation" and "reaffirmation" of the ring of the eternal return (*Ear* 13).

The final words Nietzsche writes in this passage further illuminate the eternal return as they bring together notions of life and death with the concept of the year and, notably, also with writing: "The first book of the *Revaluation of all Values*, the *Songs of Zarathustra*, the

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[4] There is some variation between the translation of *Ecce Homo* that I am using and Derrida's translation. Of course, Derrida's translation of *Ecce Homo* has also been translated for the English version of *The Ear of the Other*. Nonetheless, I will note any significant variation between Hollingdale's translation and Derrida's.

Twilight of the Idols, my attempt to philosophize with a hammer – all of them gifts of this year, of its last quarter even! *How should I not be grateful to my whole life?*[5] – And so I tell myself my life." In these sentences Nietzsche articulates gratitude to life for what "she"[6] gives and, returning to the year as the motif of the eternal return, he wishes what life gives, or what constitutes life, to return eternally. Derrida effectively expresses this relation by, in most part, paraphrasing Nietzsche:

> To receive one's life as a gift, or rather, to be grateful to life for what she gives, for giving after all what is *my* life; more precisely, to recognize one's gratitude to life for such a gift – the gift being what has managed to get written and signed with this name for which I have established my own credit and which will be what it has become only on the basis of what this year has given me (the three works mentioned in the passage), in the course of the event dated by an annual course of the sun, and even by a part of its course or recourse, its returning - to reaffirm what has occurred during these forty-four years as having been good and as bound to return eternally, immortally: this is what constitutes, gathers, adjoins, and holds the strange present of this auto-biographical *récit*[7] in place. (*Ear* 12-3)

Plainly speaking[8], then, the eternal return can be stated thus: *I love my life and I desire the future. I gratefully recognize my life and I want it to return eternally* (Derrida, *Ear* 88). And the eternal return is realized in "making the round which is the cycle of the sun or the

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[5] In *The Ear of the Other,* Derrida, or rather translator, Avital Ronell, phrases this question as, "*How could I fail to be grateful to my whole life?*" (12).

[6] In paraphrasing Derrida here I duplicate his use of the pronoun "she" to gender "life" female. At this point in the text Derrida has not yet discussed Nietzsche's articulation of himself as the dead man and living feminine. I suspect, however, that gendering "life" female is a response to Nietzsche's formulation of his "double and divided name of the father who is dead and the mother who is living on" (Derrida, *Ear* 16).

[7] Ronell leaves *récit* in French throughout *The Ear of the Other* rather than limit its connotations by translating it as "'account' or 'story' or 'narration'" (Trans note 11).

[8] By which I mean to speak in a more colloquial fashion. Surely Derrida would reprimand any other connotation of such a phrase.

annual cycle, of the annulus, of the year which annuls itself by coming back around on itself" (Derrida, *Ear* 88). But it is also realized in the form of the other who signs. When Nietzsche, or Jarman, writes himself, he writes himself to the other who is "supposed to send his signature back to him" (Derrida, *Ear* 88). "When he writes himself to himself, he has no immediate presence of himself to himself. There is the necessity of this detour through the other in the form of the eternal return of that which is affirmed . . ." (Derrida, *Ear* 88). The eternal return, in other words, occurs in the form of the other signing. But it also puts in place a kind of guarantee that the other will sign.

Unlike Nietzsche, Jarman does not articulate explicitly any "gratefulness" for his life as he puts into place, via the anniversary of his birth, the pattern or device of the eternal return. This does not mean, however, that he does not desire eternal recurrence or that the eternal return is evidenced only in the evocation of his birthday. In what I referred to above as Jarman's "birthday entry," the sun is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of Jarman's desire for the eternal return. It not only signals the annual cycle, but for Jarman in this instance, the sun's visible presence and strength differentiate this birthday from his other forty-six: "I spent an hour after lunch sitting in the sun with only a pullover – something I have never done on my birthday, which has always been a cold, grey day" (6). The sun's perceptible presence on Jarman's birthday prompts him not only to observe growth in his garden, but also to plant and to prophesy the course of the year for the sea kale: "Planted a handful of sea kale seedlings about the garden, they grow rapidly, making luxurious plants within a year" (6). He sketches the life of the plants from their current near invisibility to their spring green and summer white (6). That he anticipates, that is, predicts *and* awaits, these

plants suggests a desire to experience the future. But also, because Jarman maps out the plants' future according to calendric conventions ("by *April* they will have . . .; . . . will be submerged in *June* . . ." [6]) and therefore illustrates their subjection to the annual cycle of the sun, the plants figure as an ideal way for Jarman to enact a kind of eternal return. That is, he reminds us of plants' potential to reproduce themselves eternally and within the annual course of the sun. Yet, as the one who plants the kale, Jarman enables the possibility of this eternal return. I will return to this notion in the second section of this chapter as I discuss how, through his role as gardener, Jarman both signs and constructs the possibility of our sending his signature back to him. For now, then, I want to pay greater attention to the role of the sun in Jarman's life as that which not only signals the structure, as it were, of the eternal return, but also as that which implicitly expresses an affirmation of his life and desire for it to return eternally. The importance and the role of the sun for Jarman is perhaps best expressed less than two months after his birthday as the "dead of winter" (31) passes. He writes:

> From my home I can see the sun clamber out of a misty sea. It wakes me through the bedroom window and then stays with me all day. There are no trees or hills to hide it. When it sets over the flatlands in the west I sit and watch it on a throne-like chair that I rescued from a rubbish dump. *I never miss the setting sun*, however cold the weather. (emphasis mine; 31)

Jarman desires the eternal return so profoundly, or, rather, he wants the guarantee of the eternal return so urgently that the course of the event of his life is dated not by an annual course of the sun and its returning, but by the *daily* course of the sun and its returning. The sun is the guarantor of Jarman's life. It "wakes" him from nights, nights, which as he tells us

earlier, he associates with death: "I slept quite soundly for forty years, then something changed. Perhaps I wake myself in case I die, unconscious, at the low ebb of the night" (21).

But more telling and poignant is Jarman's assertion that he "never miss[es] the setting sun" (31). Read conventionally as the end of a cycle, be it a daily or, more metaphorically, a life cycle, the sunset tells Jarman that he has lived. "I never miss the setting sun": *I have lived another day. I am not dead yet.* Jarman, however, ritualizes the setting sun in his conviction to "never miss it." Jarman's ritual observation of the day's end illustrates a kind of recognition of or gratefulness for the life afforded by the cycle of the sun. Moreover, it suggests an anticipation, a looking ahead to the view of the sun setting again and, therefore, to the realization of another day. "I never miss the setting sun": *I* ***recognize*** *that I have lived another day* ***and*** *I wish for it to return.*

This passage in which I have read Jarman's recurring observation of the setting sun as an expression of the desire for the eternal return and the sunset as a kind of means by which this desire is symbolized and fulfilled, however, does not explicitly express why it is that Jarman seeks the day's return. That is, we are not provided with a context for why Jarman would "reaffirm what has occurred during . . . [his life] has having been good and as bound to return eternally, immortally" (Derrida, *Ear* 13).[9] Jarman can, in other words, say "I look

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[9] I acknowledge that this search for a "context" or a reason why one would want one's life to return eternally may be problematic. Wanting life to return eternally is not a product of evaluation and rationalization. One does not say, for example, "this good thing happened to me then and this good thing happened to me that time and although this was not so good that other good thing outweighed it, so I would live my entire life again." The eternal return is not necessarily a product of the evaluation of one's life. Nonetheless, as the events of a person's life circulate through the eternal return, do they not acquire certain value(s) via the signature of the other?

behind me, I look before me" (Nietzsche unpaginated), but can he say "never have I seen so many and such good things together?" (Nietzsche unpaginated). The answer to this question is both yes and no. I begin with the "no."

In pondering the "purpose" of the diary, Jarman reformulates the question of whether, looking ahead and back, he can recognize "many and such good things together":

> As the sun rose, thoughts jostling each other like demons, invaded my garden of earthly delight. What purpose had my book? Was I fugitive from my past? Had I condemned myself to prison here? How could I celebrate my sexuality filled with so much sadness, and frustration for what has been lost? How had my films been damaged? . . .
>
> Could I face the dawn cheerfully, paralysed by the virus that circles like a deadly cobra? So many friends dead or dying - since autumn: Terry, Robert, David, Ken, Paul, Howard. All the brightest and the best trampled to death . . . (56)

By formulating (at least some of) his intentions in writing the diary as questions that ask "could I?", Jarman expresses doubt about being able to look back and ahead ("face the dawn") to see "good things." The intention to "celebrate [his] sexuality" is clouded by an implicit association of being gay with HIV and AIDS, which Jarman in turn associates with the loss not only of his friends, but also of the political gains made by homosexuals during the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. "Could I face the dawn cheerfully?" suggests Jarman's intention to demonstrate his life as a positive event in the diary. But he goes on to describe the condition under which he must "face the dawn" (a turn of phrase that reminds us of the cycle of the sun and therefore of the tropes Jarman uses to figure the eternal return) as that of "paralysis," an all-consuming paralysis caused by the looming presence of death by AIDS.[10] Jarman explicitly articulates this kind of paralysis later in the diary as he discredits

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[10] Paralysis in a discussion of the eternal return is a most intriguing notion. How do we figure such paralysis in the face of the eternal return? Can paralysis and the eternal

the presumption that "knowing you're dying makes you feel more alive" (Jarman, *Modern* 152): "I'm less alive. There's less life to lead. I can't give 100% attention to anything – part of me is thinking about my health" (152). Looking ahead, then, he sees only the destruction, caused by AIDS, of "the brightest and the best," amongst whom he includes himself. Looking back, he sees the same. He also, interestingly, asks about his film work in this passage. Unlike Nietzsche, who identifies and celebrates the three works he has written during the year as gifts of the year and, thus, as reasons to be grateful to life, Jarman fears that the work of his life has been "damaged" by his sexuality and seropositivity or, rather, by the public reception of his sexuality and seropositivity. This question is, in fact, quite a vague rumination of the value Jarman attaches to his work and, thus, it is difficult to know what he intended for the reader to understand from it. Nonetheless, that he asks "how" his films have been damaged rather than, for example, "could" or "if" they have been damaged suggests not only that his work has become something he did not intend, but also that he does not recognize or has difficultly recognizing his films as "good things."

There are other moments in the diary where Jarman gestures to the impossibility of seeing "behind" and "before" "so many and good things together" (Nietzsche unpaginated) because of the presence of HIV and AIDS. Early on in the diary, in the middle of a relatively long entry (many of Jarman's entries are not more than a page, but this one is almost four pages), there occurs a break in Jarman's description of the effects of the current windstorm

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return exist concurrently? Can we think of paralysis as the condition of the eternal return? Is paralysis necessarily opposed to activity, to movement figured as, for example, a circle, a ring?

on the surrounding landscape. This break is not only made perceptible by blank lines, but is also signaled by the text contained between the blank lines:

> In the gusts yellowing half-forgotten papers whirl old headlines up and over dingy suburban houses, past leaders and obituaries, the debris of inaction, into the void. Thought illuminated briefly by lightning. The rainbows are put out, the crocks of gold lie rusting – forgotten as the fallen trees which strew the fields and dead meadows.
>
> I consider the lives of warriors, how they suddenly left their halls.
>
> Bold and noble leaders,
> I shiver and *regret my time*.
>
> But the wind does not stop for my thoughts. It whips across the flooded gravel pits drumming up waves on their waters . . . (emphasis mine; 20)

What is this rather strange bit of poetry between the narrative description of the wind doing?[11] What prompts Jarman to make such a despairing statement as "I shiver and regret my time"? And what are the consequences of regretting one's time? As separate as this line is from the surrounding text, it is not without context. We can read Jarman's description of the old newspapers as evocative of the discourse of AIDS activism. The familiar figures, after all, are operative here: the media, leaders, the dead. And the relationship of these figures to one another is also familiar to AIDS activism: the inaction of the leaders, their failure to acknowledge and to respond to AIDS as a crisis, has resulted in the deaths of millions of people.[12] Furthermore, these deaths and the inaction of leaders continues to be largely

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[11] I refer to these two lines as "poetry" not as an evaluative gesture of their work i.e. because they do something "poetic," whatever that may mean, but, rather, because of the way Jarman has set them up on the page. He inserts what he explicitly calls poems into his diary regularly and sets them apart from the rest of the text in a similar fashion.

[12] The UNAIDS Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS "AIDS epidemic update: December 1998" reports the number of worldwide "AIDS deaths" in 1998 as 2.5 million, "more than ever before in a single year" (1, 2). "Since the beginning of the epidemic" (the report does not specify a year that marks the "beginning of the epidemic")

ignored, cast "into the void" (Jarman 20).[13] These conditions – the response or lack thereof to HIV and AIDS, the very existence of AIDS, and the deaths caused by AIDS-related illnesses – characterize our and Jarman's "time." It is, therefore, these conditions as constitutive of the "time" in which we live that Jarman "regrets" or laments. But by describing this society as "*my* time," Jarman recognizes himself in an active role in this era. This "time" is not just the period during which he lives. It is also the span of his life. I do not mean to imply that Jarman regrets his life. We might read Jarman's "I shiver and regret my time" as an expression of regret for having lived during this time of AIDS, however. Both readings of "my time," nonetheless, illustrate Jarman's apparent inability to see the Nietzschean "good things" that would produce the desire of the eternal return.

Furthermore, we might read "regret" another way. Regret, after all, does not simply mean to lament or to grieve for things lost. It also means to be sorry for and thus to seek a kind of atonement. I am not suggesting that Jarman wants to apologize for being gay or for being HIV-positive. I do want to suggest, however, that Jarman seeks some degree of penance and that he searches for some kind of redemption from the conditions in which he has lived and

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13.9 million people have died of AIDS-related illness (1).

[13] This line of AIDS activist rhetoric is, admittedly, and perhaps, dangerously understated in this thesis. It is not my intention, however, to take up the question of how political leaders, that is, those who are in positions of state governance, should be responding to the AIDS crisis. For an unique discussion of the inactivity of political leaders, refer to Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston's *AIDS demo graphics*. Describing where and why the graphics that appear on the page were used, Crimp and Rolston create a significant record of American government inaction to HIV and AIDS and of ACT UP's response to this inaction during the 1980s.

lives.[14] He seeks in some ways to redeem the past. Once again, Nietzsche is particularly relevant here: "*To redeem the past* and to transform every 'It was' into an 'I wanted it thus!' – that alone I would call redemption" (80). "'I wanted it thus!'" is redemptive, according to Nietzsche, because it constitutes the kind of affirmation that in part produces the desire for the eternal return. And the eternal return is redemptive because, through the signature of the other, the presence of, for example, Jarman to Jarman ("the *autos* of my autobiography" [Derrida, *Ear* 51]) is formed. Given Nietzsche's theorem of redemption, then, the moments in which Jarman answers "yes" to the question "can he say 'never have I seen so many and such good things together?'" are particularly important.

There are several moments in which Jarman hints at being able to answer "yes" to this question. He repeatedly tells us, for example, how happy he is (25, 131, 149, 304). At the end of a mournful passage on the changes his HIV status has effected in his lifestyle, changes that include the end of "wild nights on the vodka" (25) and the feeling that "even with safer sex . . . the life of [his] partner [is] in [his] hands" (25), he writes: "This lament is not borne out by my state of mind; because apart from the nagging past – film, sex, and London – I have never been happier than last week" (25). Although the past is "nagging," then, it is a

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[14] Jarman uses "regret" again later on in the diary as he watches a porno tape. This time he refers explicitly to regret for himself but the connotation and the overall effect are still unclear and somewhat unsettling: "Given a video of *British Boys*, a porno tape that is slower than my *Angelic Conversation*! These boys can't act, let alone fuck. Crashingly boring . . . Who cares to possess *British Boys* electronically? It's at moments like this that I regret for myself and everyman, as I toss off in the sheets" (124-25). Regret in this instance is explicitly associated with gay sexuality through the porno tape and through Jarman's masturbation. Does he regret for himself that he "toss[es] off" to something he finds "crashingly boring?" Who is "everyman"? And why does Jarman regret for "everyman" and not "every man"?

past that Jarman would affirm as "'I wanted it thus!'" It is "nagging" not because he "regrets" it, but because it is not the present or the future as he wishes. That Jarman has "never been happier than last week" similarly lends itself to the formulation of the desire for the eternal return.

These sentiments are echoed in a later passage when Jarman responds to an acquaintance who asks "why [he] always appeared so happy": "Because I am the most fortunate film-maker of my generation, *I've only ever done what I wanted.* Now I just film my life, I'm a happy megalomaniac, I added" (emphasis mine; 131). Again, then, Jarman enacts what we might call the initial premise of the desire for the eternal return; "I love my life" (Derrida, *Ear* 88) along with "'I wanted it thus!'" (Nietzsche 80) can be read in Jarman's "I've only ever done what I wanted" (131). Jarman also expresses a kind of gratefulness to and for life in this passage in describing himself as "the most fortunate film-maker of [his] generation" (131). Unlike one of the passages I quoted earlier in which he asks how his films have been damaged, this passage illustrates Jarman's appreciation of his work as the gifts of his life. Given Jarman's Nietzschean recognition of his gratitude to life for the gifts, which are the films that have managed to get made and signed with his name in the course and recourse of the annual cycle of the sun (Derrida, *Ear* 12-13), the fact that Jarman "now . . . just film[s] [his] life" is also of significance. It is a gesture, much like his telling the story of his life through the diary, that serves to shape the signatory's signature. Jarman realizes that his signature will be constituted by the viewer of his films. Thus, to explicitly articulate the text, be it film or diary, *as his life* is to re-remind the signatory of his or her responsibility in producing the signature.

The final passage I want to examine as illustrative of Jarman's desire for the eternal return is perhaps the most important because Jarman evokes the eternal return in the face of HIV and AIDS. After transcribing sections of the Jehavoh's Witnesses' publication, *Watchtower*, which attributes the spread of "AIDS . . . into the mainstream of our society and into the bloodstreams of innocent victims via contaminated donour blood" to the sexual revolution that "promised joy, liberation, and good health, . . . [and] delivered misery, disaster, even death" (149), Jarman writes the following:

> As I sweat it out in the early hours, a 'guilty victim' of the scourge, I want to bear witness to how happy I am, and will be until the day I die, that I was part of the hated sexual revolution; and that I don't regret a single step or encounter I made in that time; and if I write in future with regret, it will be a reflection of temporary indisposition. (149)

Again, we hear echoes of Nietzsche: all of the encounters (the "'It was['es]'") Jarman recounts for us, from his first fuck "in the basement of 64 Priory Road, Kilburn" (114) to his "trick" with a "Mass Murderer" (115), are confirmed experiences of "'I wanted it thus!'" (Nietzsche 80). Furthermore, Jarman's promise to be happy "until the day [he] dies" (149) gestures toward the sentiment expressed in the eternal return as "I desire the future." Most important, however, is that Jarman makes these sentiments in explicit relation to his HIV. In the face of HIV and AIDS, recognizing and mourning the losses incurred through the virus and the disease, Jarman endorses the eternal return.

This advocacy is reaffirmed as Jarman "indicates [another] place of the signature" (Derrida, *Ear* 11) in "'dating from'" (Derrida, *Ear* 11) the day of his HIV test: "*Friday 22* Third anniversary of my HIV test. The 22nd has become a second New Year for me" (208). In *Modern Nature*, then, the anniversary of Jarman's HIV test functions in much the same

way the anniversary of Nietzsche's birth functions in *Ecce Homo*. Both dates, as anniversaries, of course, mark the simultaneous abrogation and beginning again of the year (Derrida, *Ear* 11). And each date puts into place not only the signature, but also the structure of the eternal return. But what does it mean for Jarman to sign from the "place" of his HIV test, from a "place" that is commonly associated, and more closely associated than the birthday, with imminent death? And why does he figure the eternal return largely through this anniversary? Signing from the HIV test as well as figuring the eternal return through the anniversary of his HIV test are part of Jarman's strategic modeling of the reader, the one who will sign for him. For Jarman, the "keen-enough ear," the reader who will hear and understand the message of the text and of Jarman's signature (Derrida, *Ear* 50) is someone who will recognize the effects of HIV and AIDS on his thinking about and telling his life. The day of the HIV test as an anniversary does not simply mark the moment at which his life divides into "life before HIV" and "life after HIV." Jarman understands the day of his HIV test as an anniversary because he perceives it as forming, to borrow again from Derrida, a ring or annulus, that which turns back on itself (*Ear* 11). He wants the reader to recognize the possibility of life and the possibility of the reaffirmation of life in the face of death, specifically in the face of HIV and AIDS. But what kind of signature does this produce? What does the signature of "the gay, HIV-positive man" look like? And what is the signature of the "keen-enough ear," when he or she gives a signature back to Jarman, supposed to look like?

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A garden, where poor wayward humanity is capable of being swayed by emotions which make for peace and beauty.

- Derek Jarman, *Modern Nature* 10

This epigraph is meant to constitute a provisional answer to the questions I posed above. As what Jarman describes as a "memorial" (55) for his friends who have died of AIDS, he creates the garden, first, to produce a signature for those who no longer have or never had a voice with which to sign. In so doing, however, Jarman provides the reader with a model for how to produce a signature for the dead of AIDS, amongst whom he rather paradoxically figures himself. (I refer to this figuring as "paradoxical" because of his evocation of the eternal return, which grants Jarman a certain kind of eternal life through the infinite production of the signature). Thus, the garden also becomes Jarman's signature and a text that is left to the reader to sign. The garden and its apparent production of (a) multifarious signature(s) is reckoned not only through Jarman's descriptions of its contents, but also through events that occur in or around the garden. I want to begin by examining one incident in particular that figures as a trope not only for how Jarman wants us to read his production of a signature for his friends, but, more significantly for how we are meant to read Jarman's diary. Keeping in mind the kind of structure plotted by this occasion, I then explore some of Jarman's more explicit articulations of the garden as a kind of signature for his friends. Interestingly, Jarman uses poems in several instances, rather than his usual stream-of-conscious-like prose, to express his intentions in planting and nurturing the garden.

On a June day, after correcting various newspapers and tabloids who were reporting that he was on his death bed, Jarman is met at his Prospect Cottage by a "hapless reporter from the *Sun*" (94) who wants to take his photo. Jarman relays the entire event:

> "Do you mind if I photo you?"
>
> "Yes, but since one way or another you're going to, we might as well do a good job of it. Not in front of the house, on the beach."
>
> We trek off across the shingle. I sense he wants to get this assignment over with as quickly as possible. I offer to carry his camera bag with a malicious smile. When we set up at the water's edge he says,
>
> "I'm only a snapper."
>
> "Well," I say, "this is your chance to take a decent photo." I fix him with a basilisk stare as he clicks away.
>
> "You look uncomfortable," he remarks.
>
> "Not so much as *you* should."
>
> "Oh?"
>
> "I'm writing a diary, which I'm publishing. You're today's entry. *When all is said and done what I choose to write will, I expect, be the only trace of your life. Your memory is in my hands.*"
>
> Long silence.
>
> "The *Sun*'s not kept by the British Museum, the paper destroys itself it's so acid. When you get back tell your editor to read the retraction in the *People*. . . . "
>
> I kept him snapping for as long as I could. I hope he remembers the session. (emphasis of "When all is said . . . " mine; 94-5)

Jarman accomplishes several things in this passage. First, and most obviously, he makes explicit his intention to publish the diary. This signals, of course, that, because he always had an audience in mind, he always constructed his entries with certain intentions. More important, however, Jarman uses this incident to remind the reader of not only what he is trying to do, but also what responsibility is entrusted to the reader in his or her inheritance of the text (Derrida, *Ear* 51). Like the photographer in this passage, who tries to obtain a representation of Jarman for the purpose of publication, Jarman too tries to create a representation of himself through the diary. But the reader of the diary also seeks a kind of representation of Jarman through interpreting the text or signing for him. Thus, on the one

hand, we might suggest that Jarman figures the reader in the role of the photographer and that he cautions the reader not to assume that representations are accurate. The final lines of this passage are also interesting if we read the photographer and the reader as inhabiting similar roles: "I kept him snapping as long as I could. I hope he remembers the session" (95). Throughout this incident Jarman tries to reclaim his image as his own and reverse the power structure of the gazer and the gazed upon through evoking his writing as the more significant, lasting way of preserving the likeness of someone. In these last two lines, however, he seems to relinquish the position of power he has gained as the recorder, the gazer, in hoping that the photographer "remembers the session" (95). As is the case in writing the diary, he wants to be remembered more than he wants to remember.

The most significant sentences in this passage, however, do not lend themselves easily to such a reading. Jarman's "when all is said and done what I choose to write will, I expect, be the only trace of your life. Your memory is in my hands" (95) is not easily interpreted as an address to the reader, but could be words, at least in part, spoken to himself. In acknowledging the potential of his writing to "be the only trace of [the photographer's] life," he also implies that the writing produces a trace of *his* life. Notably, this trace is a "chose[n]" trace and we are reminded once again that Jarman shapes our production of the signature in choosing what of himself he represents to us. Nonetheless, in warning the photographer, "Your memory is in my hands," Jarman recognizes the reader as the signatory. But this expression also reminds the reader of the responsibility of producing the signature. Jarman's memory is our hands. What *is* the responsibility of having his memory in our hands? Jarman offers an answer to this question by, as I have mentioned, taking in his own hands the

memories of many of his friends who have died of AIDS. Out of the desolate landscape and with the nuclear power plant as a backdrop, he builds a garden at his Prospect Cottage as a memorial to his friends. The diary is filled with details of the garden's contents and historical and personal myths associated with the plants. Surprised by the flowering rosemary in February, for example, Jarman recalls the words of Thomas More, "who loved it, . . . '. . . it is the herb sacred to remembrance and therefore to friendship'" (9). In another instance, after counting "well over 50 buds on the daffodils [he] planted last year" (12), Jarman recalls the lore of the plant: "Daffodil bulbs were used by Galen, surgeon of the school of the gladiators, to glue together great wounds and gashes; the bulbs were carried for a similar purpose in the back-packs of Roman soldiers" (12). While Jarman gives us many details such as these, which we are intended to read as symbolically important to the signature Jarman gives to his dead friends (i.e. the presence of rosemary in the garden suggests that Jarman and the garden perform acts of remembrance), rarely does he associate explicitly the garden as a memorial to his friends with the historical myth or connotation of the plants that constitute this memorial. The first explicit description of the garden as a memorial, however, is an exception to this general pattern:

> My garden is a memorial, each circular bed and dial a true lover's knot - planted with lavender, helichryssum and santolina.
>
> *Santolina, under the dominion of Mercury resisteth poison, putrefaction, and heals the bites of venomous beasts.* Whilst a sprig of lavender held in the hand or placed under the pillow enables you to see ghosts, travel to the land of the dead. (55)

Evoking the legends of these plants, particularly the lavender, Jarman creates the garden as a place that both he and his dead friends can inhabit. The garden may, in part, be the "land of the dead," but Jarman and anyone else who holds the lavender can also "travel" there.

While the santolina is worthy of note because through it, or rather according to its lore, Jarman can offer preservation and health to the memory of his friends, it is perhaps more interestingly read as illustrative of how Jarman's friends have been lost. That is, "poison" and "putrefaction" are reminiscent of the rhetoric of AIDS in which infection is associated with "poisoned" blood and illness is associated with "putrefaction" or degeneration. This passage, however, is also interesting for Jarman's description not of the contents of the garden, but of the design: circular beds and dials. The circle, we might suggest, evokes the notion of the eternal return. That Jarman uses the circle to "memorialize" his dead friends, to sign for them, and to create a text that the reader is left to sign again for them, puts in place a kind of guarantee of the eternal return and, therefore, of the signature of the other.

Jarman evokes the notion of the eternal return in the garden using several other already familiar motifs. In one of his longer poems, for example, he employs again the daily cycle of the sun as well as the annual cycle. This particular poem, however, is also illustrative of the signature he produces and, in turn, of the signature he wishes for the reader to reproduce for him. For this reason, despite its length, I quote the poem in its entirety:

> I walk in this garden
> Holding the hands of dead friends
> Old age came quickly for my frosted generation
> Cold, cold, cold they died so silently
> Did the forgotten generations scream?
> Or go full of resignation
> Quietly protesting innocence
> Cold, cold, cold they died so silently
>
> Linked hands at four AM
> Deep under the city you slept on
> Never heard the sweet flesh song
> Cold, cold, cold they died so silently

I have no words
My shaking hand
Cannot express my fury
Sadness is all I have,
Cold, cold, cold they died so silently

Matthew fucked Mark fucked Luke fucked John
Who lay in the bed that I lie on
Touch fingers again as you sing this song
Cold, cold, cold they died so silently

My gilly flowers, roses, violets blue
Sweet garden of vanished pleasures
Please come back next year
Cold, cold, cold I die so silently

Goodnight boys,
Goodnight Johnny,
Goodnight,
Goodnight. (69-70)

At the beginning of the poem, the garden is figured once again as a place where Jarman, and by extension, the reader, can dwell with the dead. The lavender we held in our hand earlier it seems has resulted in our holding the hands of the dead. The hand, in fact, figures prominently in this poem as a motif through which we can read not only Jarman's signature, but also the sculpting of our own. Put simply, Jarman asks the reader to watch his hands. For their movements produce a signature. Jarman moves from holding the hands of the dead to recollecting a linking of hands to having a shaking hand in the third stanza and back to a touching of fingers in the fourth stanza. The holding, linking, and touching are most obviously gestures of preservation for Jarman and gestures that we necessarily imitate in reading – holding in our hands – his diary. But by the third stanza there is a kind of recognition of the impossibility of this preservation through the signature: "I have no words/My shaking hand/Cannot express my fury" (69). The hand, the mechanism with which

we invest the literal ability to sign, cannot produce a signature for the dead or, it seems, for Jarman himself ("*my* fury"). Yet it does: "I have no words" are words that contribute to the production of a signature through the diary. What Jarman seems to acknowledge with his "shaking hand," then, is that his own signature for the dead, like the signature we are to produce for him, is already in some ways inaccurate. In the next stanza, however, invoking the reader explicitly in his use of the second-person, Jarman tells us to "touch fingers again as you sing this song" (70). Jarman instructs the reader thus: *as you read this poem, as you read this diary, "touch fingers again" (70) with those whose hands I hold and with me, my own hands*. He necessarily asserts, then, that we are *able* to "touch fingers again" through reading this poem and his work. Our "touching [of] fingers," moreover, constitutes our production of the signature, a signature that is necessarily linked, through Jarman, to his dead friends. Jarman's transcription, if you will, of the production of our signature for him is also notable in its use of the word "again." In addition to implying that we have already "touch[ed] fingers" or produced a signature, "again" suggests that we can recurrently do so. This notion, of course, is befitting to Derrida's notions of the text as that which "remains *essentially* open to the other (to reading)" (Bennington 163) and thus open to an infinite number of unique signatures. "Again" paradoxically, however, also reflects the necessarily absolute repeatability, iterability of the signature (Culler 126; Bennington 159).

There is one last detail worthy of attention in this call to "touch fingers again as you sing this song" (70) and that is Jarman's use of the word "sing." I have read "singing" as "reading" and "song" as the poem and/or the diary itself and while these are applicable interpretations, I also think Jarman's use of the word "sing" to describe the act of the reader

here is important. To sing, after all, is to vocalize and to recite. In attributing to this poem or, even more generally to this diary, the status of a song, Jarman suggests that the diary is a vocalization, which seems like an obvious assertion to make of any text. That he calls the reader to "sing," to repeat *and* verbalize the text, however, seems to me to suggest that the reader is intended to bring the text to a larger audience.

In the fifth stanza of the poem we return explicitly to the garden and are reminded of its repeatability, a repeatability that is, therefore, also characteristic of Jarman's signature as it is figured through the garden. Jarman's invitation of the garden to return next year ("Please come back next year" [70]), simultaneously solicits the reader's signature and suggests that the garden as his signature will be reproduced even in his absence. His absence is evoked, most obviously, through the turn in the last line from "they die so silently" to "I die so silently" (70). We can link this turn and imminent disappearance of Jarman from the garden to the absence of the motif of the hand in this stanza. Jarman's hand, as that with which he literally signs, disappears upon the explicit evocation of his death. What happens, then, to the reader when, upon Jarman's urging, we have watched his hand through the poem to this point of its absence? The absence of the hand, read in conjunction with the invitation to the garden to return and Jarman's explicit mention of his death, signals the "interruption of an ability to sign" (Bennington 157). But "as the possibility of the interruption of an ability to sign forms part of what we call a signature, we see that the signature . . . only moves [the power of death] to a different level" (Bennington 157-58). That "different level" here is the possibility of the reader's signature.

I want to explore briefly one final description of Jarman's garden at Prospect Cottage. Part of the garden is a herbal garden, planted before and somewhat in anticipation of his HIV-related illnesses:

> I water the roses and wonder whether I will see them bloom. I plant my herbal garden as a panacea, read up on all the aches and pains that plants will cure – and know they are not going to help. The garden as pharmacopoeia has failed.
>
> Yet there is a thrill in watching the plants spring up that gives me hope.
>
> Even so, I find myself unable to record the disaster that has befallen some of my friends, particularly dear Howard, who I miss more than imagination. (179)

While this passage is notable for the absence of Jarman's vivid descriptions of the plants and their roles in memorializing his friends, it is more striking in its contemplation of Jarman's "failures" and the contradictory character of those "failures." Jarman pronounces the failure of the garden as pharmacopoeia. But at the same time as he is certain of its failure, he cannot help but find a redemptive hope in the growth and life of the plants. It is precisely this hope on which Jarman figures the reader's signature. That is, this hope as signed by Jarman through the garden is what we are meant to reproduce through the act of our signing. The "keen-enough ear," in other words, will call up and commit Jarman's signature through this hope in and for life in the face of death.[15]

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[15] Reading *Ecce Homo* alongside *Modern Nature*, Jarman's mention of hope evokes Nietzsche's seemingly arrogant proclamation that "only after me is it possible to hope again" (97). I do not want to speculate on what Nietzsche's intentions were in making such a wonderfully imperious declaration. Nor do I want to suggest that Jarman might be making a Nietzschean pronouncement in the above passage. I do, however, think that by putting the eternal return and the signature into play, as it were, through the various tropes and figures that I have examined, Jarman ensures that "after me . . . it [is] possible to hope."

Yet, disconcertingly, Jarman follows this expression of hope for and reassurance of life with an articulation of what he understands as one of the failures of the diary?[16]: "Even so, I find myself unable to record the disaster that has befallen some of my friends" (179). Why is Jarman's self-professed inability to "record the disaster"of HIV and AIDS juxtaposed with the hope he gains from "watching the plants spring up" (179)? Is hope lost when Jarman cannot "record the disaster" of HIV and AIDS? Jarman's response to this last question, it appears from this passage, would be yes. The reader's first response to these questions, however, might appropriately be another question: Isn't what Jarman does in this diary "record[ing] the disaster that has befallen some of [his] friends?" What Jarman does in this passage, in juxtaposing the expression of his inability to record the affects of HIV and AIDS with his hope for life in the face of AIDS, I want to suggest, is re-remind the reader of his or her responsibility in producing the signature. He signals the importance of hope produced through the garden, which is in part his signature, but also acknowledges that his signature (produced both via the garden and the diary) cannot be the only response to or signature of his dead friends. Again, the reader must respond with his or her own signature for Jarman.

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[16] I point to the diary here as that to which Jarman refers also in writing of his inability to "record" the affects of HIV and AIDS (as opposed to the other mediums he used such as canvas and film) because he expresses similar frustrations with specific reference to the diary at other moments: "I am conscious, as I write this diary, of the limitations and loyalties that it has imposed – as I have always been aware that it would be published. How much can it tell of our dilemma?" (298). Recovering from a long period of illness in the hospital, Jarman remarks: ". . . it's only now I realize what a delirium I have been in for the last five weeks, no sense of time. This diary gives the wrong impression, it's much too focused. I'm emerging from a strange dream" (275).

Interestingly, I struggle to find appropriately conclusive remarks on Jarman's diary. I have signed *Modern Nature* at Jarman's request. Has my ear been "keen-enough?" Is my inability to reiterate the text's accomplishments indicative of those very same accomplishments? That is, responding to Jarman's signature with my own, am I enacting a concretization of Jarman's eternal return? Is this guarantee of inconclusiveness, eternal "life" through the signature of the other, not the requirement of the text and therefore of the reader? Perhaps Jarman's own words most succinctly encapsulate the feat of *Modern Nature*: "Now it doesn't matter when I die, for I have survived" (*Risk* 10).

Chapter Three

Opulent "Middle Ground": Metafiction and AIDS Activism in Dale Peck's *Martin and John*

How should we represent or imagine AIDS?
– Alexander García Düttman, *At Odds With AIDS* 29

The question I have chosen as an epigraph not only encapsulates a major ongoing discussion within queer theory and AIDS activism, but also signals something of a turn in my approach to examining texts that concern themselves with HIV and AIDS. As the only work of overt fiction examined in this thesis, Dale Peck's 1993 debut novel *Martin and John* seems to me to prompt questions about how to represent HIV and AIDS rather than how to *read* those representations. That is, where the activism of Hoffman's and Jarman's work depends largely on the writer's ability to produce a certain effect in or on the reader, the activism of Peck's novel lies more directly in the representations of AIDS that it offers. This is not to say that the role of the reader as the recipient of these representations is not essential in this or any text. What I am suggesting, however, is that Peck foregrounds the importance of the images of HIV and AIDS themselves rather than their reception.[1]

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[1] I do not mean to suggest that images or representations can be considered separate from their reception. An image must necessarily be received – viewed, read, etc. – to accomplish anything. Many AIDS activist artists and some critics, however, fail to comprehend the extent to which these images *must* (as in "have to") and *necessarily* (as in "always do"), in the terms I have used throughout this thesis, sculpt a reader. Instead, they emphasize the act of creating representations of HIV and AIDS that seek to counter the images of AIDS produced by dominant, mainstream culture as an activist event itself.

Thus, because Peck engages the question of how we should represent AIDS (and for all of the writers discussed in this thesis it is evident that there is never a question of whether we "should" represent AIDS; thus, the "should" in Düttman's question accurately implies an imperative to do so.) by offering a series of representations of HIV and AIDS that at once align themselves with and oppose AIDS activist representations, this chapter explores the images that constitute such representations rather than explicitly theorizing their impact on the reader. A series of non-linear, fragmented, debatably multivocal accounts of the lives of gay "(white urban middle-class)" (Champagne 178) men during the current age of AIDS, *Martin and John*, then, offers an intriguingly contradictory response to Düttman's question of how we should represent AIDS.

On the one hand, I want to suggest that openly gay writer Peck's artistic practice is continuous with what we might call the dominant aesthetic of gay art in the 1990s (Brophy 174). Peck, like founding AIDS critics and activists Douglas Crimp and Simon Watney, pursues the demand of the so-called "AIDS activist aesthetic" to produce a counter-representational account of AIDS and people living with AIDS. That is, Peck seeks to create alternatives to the images and rhetoric of AIDS produced by dominant culture (Watney, "Representing" 171). The characters in *Martin and John*, do not, for example, occupy the

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And while I do not deny the importance of such images, we cannot call them "counter-representations" without theorizing what effect they produce in the recipient/reader and, in turn, what is produced by the recipient/reader as a result of having received the representation. Unfortunately, many AIDS activist artists and critics seem to think their work is done upon offering their conceptualizations – be they written, visual, etc. – of HIV and AIDS. Part of what this thesis accomplishes is that next step, the theorization of the effect of the representation on the reader and the subsequent responsibility with which the reader is left.

dominant and damaging role of ailing "AIDS victim." They do not lie isolated in hospital beds; they are not, in most cases, marked by visible external signs of HIV or AIDS (Watney, "Representing" 179). Despite the reader's eventual understanding of the novel as a means by which the narrator mourns the AIDS-related death of his lover, Martin, the reader cannot reduce the characters to a "foredoomed conclusion" (Grover 29) of death. Rather, Peck, using urgent and turbulent narratives [2] of abuse, desire, and seduction, forces us to comprehend the characters as active and living and, therefore, according to conventional thought, valuable. Because death in some ways is thought to erase a person's existence[3] and because death is made discernible by HIV and AIDS, people with HIV are commonly "virtual[ly] cancell[ed]" (Grover 29). Despite the presence of death in this novel, however,

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[2] The life or the activity of Peck's characters is, as I have suggested, largely an effect of formal narrative techniques. Peck's fragmented narratives and segments of multiple characters' lives, for instance, impress upon the reader a sense of continual change and constant action. But it is also worth noting that the first mention of "AIDS" does not occur until page 93 in the novel and even then it is merely the caption on one of John's T-shirts: "AIDSwalk'87." Later in the book, John writes of not wanting to name Martin's illness: "[we] were . . . unwilling to give his illness the legitimacy, the *finality* of a name" (emphasis mine; 215). The absence of "AIDS" and "HIV" in the novel, that is, the absence of the name "AIDS," I want to suggest, is also part of Peck's strategy to emphasize the life of the characters. By refusing to name "AIDS" Peck also refuses dominant culture's association of AIDS with death. See my footnote 18 for a further discussion of the "absence" of "AIDS" in the novel.

[3] As I have demonstrated in the previous two chapters, the notion that death erases one's existence is something of a fallacy. In fact, death paradoxically necessarily preserves one's existence whether it be through the mourner's interiorization or through the production of the signature. Nonetheless, there does exist a common perception that death is opposed to life and that death cancels one's existence. We should be reminded here of Hoffman's comments upon Mike's death: "My philosophy was that when Mike died my responsibility ended" (85). Thus, if one associates AIDS with death and therefore understands the person with AIDS as imminently dead (another rather bizarre association – who is not "imminently dead"?), that person and their value as a living being is erased.

Peck's characters are not dismissible.

Proponents of the AIDS activist aesthetic, on the other hand, might easily accuse Peck of perpetrating stereotypes of gay men. The gay male characters in *Martin and John* are often extravagant, opulent, and narcissistic or seemingly passive and awkward. One of the characters named Martin offers to buy John tourmaline, dresses him in an Armani suit, fills his apartment with flowers, bathes John in Perrier, or "perhaps even champagne" (183). Another set of John and Martin, after attending a funeral during the day, go to an opera at night and "sit in [their] finery" (158, 159). They fly to Jamaica "the day after the first snowfall" and "loll indolently upon the white-glass beaches" (151). Other characters, also named Martin and John, fantasize about New York as the gay utopia and in so doing evoke the stereotype of gay men as vain and sexually promiscuous:

> men everywhere. In their own bars, their own cafes, their own clubs. . . .And the men hug and kiss and make love with whomever they choose, and when they go out they display themselves, slicking back their hair and rolling up their sleeves to show off their arms, or no shirt at all, and tight jeans that show off everything else. They hold hands even . . . they wear jewellery and they strut like peacocks. (118-19)

Furthermore, the men in *Martin and John* have a lot of sex – a fact that contributes to their stereotypically indulgent characters. Peck's substantial portrayals of male homosexual activity, then, might also be met with opposition from AIDS activist artists who read the abundant representation of sex as the neglect of political critique or even as a politics of non-activism.[4] The AIDS activist aesthetic, after all, seeks to construct a discursive subject

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[4] Of course, as AIDS activists have argued, a neglect of political critique or the absence of an oppositional activist politics (the "Silence" of ACT UP's inaugural slogan Silence = Death) is as damaging as the dominant discourse of AIDS. Founding AIDS activist Larry Kramer perhaps best illustrates this notion when he asserts that "all of you [who] continue to refuse to transmit to the public the facts and figures of what is

in opposition to the supposed dominant perception and representation of the gay man as, for example, addicted to pleasure (Edelman 105). As Lee Edelman argues in "'The Mirror and The Tank': 'AIDS,' Subjectivity, and the Rhetoric of Activism," there is an "ongoing campaign to refashion the gay subject in terms of an 'AIDS activist' identity that deploys, on occasion, as the mirror image against which it would call itself into being, a contemptuous depiction of non-'activist' gay man as narcissists addicted to pleasure, resistant to struggle, and therefore themselves responsible for the continuing devastation of 'AIDS'" (105). Peck's emphasis on his characters' sexual desire, I want to suggest, is a response to this "refashioning" imposed by dominant AIDS activist discourse. Reconstituting the gay male subject using gay sexuality and its ideologically stigmatized characteristics of "narcissism," "passivity," and "luxury" (Edelman 109), Peck not only reveals an awareness of the contradictions inherent in the AIDS activist oppositional subject-position (a subject-position constructed within a dominant ideology can never escape implication in it despite attempts to analyse, exploit, or undermine that ideology [Edelman 107; Hutcheon, *Politics* 4]), but also simultaneously offers an alternative mode of resistance to both dominant politics and to the

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happening *daily* makes you, in my mind, equal to murderers" (quoted in Edelman 88). Although Kramer's call for "facts and figures" as constitutive of a discourse that resists dominant ideologues is problematic (Edelman 88), his assertion is still a call for an action that will necessarily disrupt the silence about the annihilation of gay people (Crimp and Rolston 14). Many critics have discussed the implications of such silence, usually by debating the potency of the Silence = Death slogan. See Lee Edelman's "The Plague of Discourse: Politics, Literary Theory, and 'AIDS'" and Cindy Patton's "Power and the Conditions of Silence." Both Edelman and Patton contend that Silence = Death is no longer a useful maxim. Douglas Crimp responds to Edelman in an essay entitled "Mourning and Militancy" by asserting the continued efficacy of the Silence = Death slogan as a powerful emblem of AIDS activism. Crimp and Rolston also discuss the "Silence" of Silence = Death in their *AIDS demo graphics*.

AIDS activist politics. In its constitutive opposition to dominant conceptualizations of homosexuality, AIDS activist politics, argues Edelman, risks becoming a "politics as usual" (116) formed at the expense of gay men (107) and thus merits the kind of resistance Peck enacts.

Paradoxically, then, *Martin and John* employs and opposes formulations of so-called "counter-representation" (Crimp, "AIDS Cultural Analysis" 14) advocated by AIDS activist artists. Peck's use of these two apparently antithetical strategies occurs, however, not only in the narrative accounts of the lives of gay men in *Martin and John*. That is, not only the thematic concerns and subsequent representations of gay men affected by AIDS embody this paradoxical rhetorical strategy. The genre or the form of the novel, as constituted by experimental literary techniques, also creates a similar paradox. *Martin and John*, as a metafictional novel, or, to borrow from Linda Hutcheon, a "narcissistic narrative" (*Narcissistic Narrative* 1), challenges dominant modes of representation (traditional narrative form) by refusing to employ conventions of fiction such as linear plot and character development. But, like its AIDS activist aesthetic counterpart, such experimentalism is necessarily implicated in the ideology it seeks to subvert. Furthermore, codifying metafictional strategy, as I have just to some extent done, undermines the capacity of texts such as *Martin and John* to challenge dominant ideology.[5] This is in part why critics like Mark Currie insist that metafiction resists definition. Metafiction's characteristic self-

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[5] Critics of so-called "postmodern appropriation art" (Crimp and Rolston 18), which is said to characterize "AIDS activist art," make a similar claim. The co-opting, by an (ironically) institutionalized and codified postmodernism, nullifies the "activist" art's ability to upset dominant cultural ideologies (Brophy 174; Crimp and Rolston 19).

consciousness, its reflexive awareness of the conditions of the construction of meaning, and its subsequent classification as a borderline discourse between fiction and criticism (Currie 15) mean that any "typological definition rooted in objective characteristics or essences . . . contradict the linguistic philosophy that it attempts to describe" (Currie 15). Yet the kind of typology, by which I mean the categorization or genre that emerges when we attempt to describe *Martin and John* and its constitutive literary techniques provides an interesting complement to what I characterize as Peck's alternative mode of resistance.

The novel is divided into alternating italicized and plain-type chapters. The first set, printed in italics, are brief, seemingly random, but urgent and often violent recollections of a first-person narrator who we assume to be John throughout. The italicized chapters, in their sense of immediacy, resemble journal entries or, as Champagne suggests, "autobiographical ruminations" (180), autobiographical, that is, for fictional narrator John. The second set of chapters, printed in plain type, are longer, more conventionally developed narratives with distinguishable characters. These chapters are also told by a first-person narrator, and while that narrator is always named John, he is not always the same character. That is, different narrators who share the name John, at least until the end of the novel, recollect different stories about their families and lovers, who also share proper names. Martin is always John's lover, for example. Bea and Henry are usually John's parents, but Henry is also the name of Martin's lover in a chapter called "The Search for Water." Susan is always a friend and sometimes a lover to John. Names seldom find a stable referent (Champagne 179), but, because they are a common thread, there is some, albeit unstable, sense that the italicized

chapters and the plain-type chapters are linked.[6] It is not until the end of the novel, however, that this enigma is at least somewhat resolved (Champagne 179) in a characteristic metafictional turn that sees the author, or at least a figure of the author, step into the text. The authorial figure suggests that the narrator John is a character he created to enable him to tell his own stories. The same authorial figure also pronounces the fictional status of all we have just read not only by recalling one of the novel's opening passages as "something that hadn't happened" (225), but also by admitting that "everything's been a little confused . . . what's real and what's invented" (225). This self-awareness, the novel's layered commentary on its own narrative, by which I mean the unveiling of stories within stories and the revelation of the constructedness of those stories via not only the narrators' comments on the stories, but also via the formal structure of the novel's alternating and fragmentary chapters, contribute to the novel as a characteristic "narcissistic narrative." The novel's self-consciousness and self-reflexivity, particularly emphasized by the authorial figure's concluding declaration of the novel's fictional constructions (a gesture that threatens to vaporize all that comes before it), forces the reader to interpret recursively (Champagne 181) the novel as its own subject (McCaffrey 183).[7]

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[6] The sense that the novel's chapters are linked probably comes more than anything from a desire in the reader, myself included, to find a link. In other words, while Peck challenges our conventional reading practices, he also relies on our refusal to abandon completely a search for some level of coherence.

[7] I do not mean to suggest that novels about themselves are somehow new and therefore necessarily subversive or disruptive. Yet it is worth noting that Peck claims he is searching for a "new way to do" narrative, a "new way" that "attacks" the traditional idea of narrative and of fiction (Bronski). His search for this "new way," he explains, is a response to his discomfort with "using accepted [literary] forms to convey the multiplicity and isolation of queer lives" (Bronski). Thus, the formal "experimental" textual strategies

My use of the term "narcissistic" to describe *Martin and John* is not intended to be derogatory.[8] Rather, I mean for it to echo my description of Peck's reconstitution of the gay male subject and of dominant culture's ideological stigma of gay male "narcissism." Similarly, techniques such as multiple narrative fragments, seemingly arbitrary use of the same proper names to refer to different characters, numerous self-reflexive images, and repeated commentary on the narratives contribute to the novel's character as "excessive." In a parallel way, Peck's descriptions of gay male desire and sex might be construed as "excessive." My description of the novel as "excessive," is meant to evoke the dominant association of the gay man with "opulence" or "luxury" and, therefore, with Peck's reconsideration of this stigma of the gay male subject. What I want to ask, then, is how the genre of the narcissistic

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of *Martin and John* can be understood, according to Peck's comments, as a kind of political strategy. He proffers "alternative" modes of narrative to counter conventions of fiction and narrative that inadequately represent queer lives. Experimental literary techniques such as those Peck uses – typographic experimentation, inventing narrator, narrative fragmentation, seemingly arbitrary temporal organization of narratives – I want to acknowledge, are also commonly identified as exemplary postmodernist textual strategies. My assertion of a relation between Peck's formal techniques and a political position, then, inevitably raises questions about the equation of postmodernist radical textual strategies with a "radical political stance" (Clark 82). While I do not want to dismiss this (often too readily asserted) equation (Clark 82), it is not my intention to argue that Peck's novel is resistant or disruptive, politically activist even, solely because of its use of "postmodernist" and/or "experimental" literary techniques. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this project to theorize the relation between these types of "postmodern" techniques and the political work of a text. I say unfortunately, because a lot of gay fiction and texts written about HIV and AIDS employ these kinds of experimental techniques *and* have distinct political goals.

[8] I am aware of the pathologization of homosexuality as "narcissist" by Freud and others. Of course, it is interesting to note that in "On Narcissism: An Introduction" Freud refers to narcissism as the "universal original condition" of man, making it, as Linda Hutcheon points out, "more than just pathological behaviour" (Freud quoted in Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* 1).

narrative of *Martin and John* signals and affects what appears to be Peck's own AIDS activist project. Narcissistic and opulent, are the metafictional narratives of *Martin and John* passive? "Narcissistic" and "opulent," is the gay male subject "passive"?[9] How do Peck's reconsideration of the gay male subject and his experimental narrative form in *Martin and John* converge to respond to the question of how we should represent or imagine AIDS?

Reflections

One of the most revealing recurring motifs in *Martin and John* is the image of the mirror. A self-reflexive image appropriate to the narcissistic narrative, the mirror also provides a useful way for us to begin to consider Peck's reconsideration of the stigma of the gay male subject as narcissistic. The mirror, furthermore, is a frequent motif in writing that deals with AIDS, commonly reflecting bodily transformations and physical affects of HIV and AIDS.[10] As Lee Edelman argues, in addition to "[r]eflecting the transformations the body

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[9] The quotation marks in this sentence are meant to signal simultaneously suspicion and a kind of special meaning. I mean to demonstrate a suspicion of the negative connotations associated with these traits as characteristic of gay men as well as to reinvest the terms with the capability to signal a certain kind of activism. I am indebted to Daniel Coleman for his queries on quotation marks.

[10] In "'The Mirror and The Tank'" Edelman discusses examples of the mirror trope in three literary texts that address the gay male subject and AIDS, including one in Hervé Guibert's *To The Friend Who Did Not Save My Life*. See pages 114 - 116. And although Düttman does not examine the mirror, his discussion of the "two decisive topoi of self-reflection" (14) in the novels of Guibert compliment and illuminate Edelman's brief consideration of a moment in which the HIV-positive narrator, named Guibert, realizes he must "accustom [himself] to this emaciated face that the mirror each time gave [him] back." He continues, "it would be necessary, either as the height of narcissism or as its interruption, that I succeed in loving it." (I have used Edelman's own translation of Guibert's book. In the Macmillian translation of the novel the passage differs intriguingly in, for example, the use of tenses: "I would've had to get used to this cadaverous face

must undergo, [the mirror] also figures the discursive compulsion to reflect on the history that can seem to have led to this counternarcissistic confrontation with the body whose undoing the specular moment can seem at once to disclose and causally, to explain" (Edelman 114). The "history" of which Edelman writes is the "derisive representation of gay men as narcissistically fixated" (Edelman 101) because of their desire for the same and "passive" because of the "receptivity" of anal intercourse (Bersani 212). In the "phobic discourse of the culture at large," gay sexuality is defined "by the mirror and the anus" (Edelman 106). And the so-called "passive" act of anal intercourse prescribes, according to dominant discourse, a "willing sacrifice of. . . subjectivity" since subjectivity is only attributed to those who perform the penetrative "active" role in "the active-passive binarism that organizes 'our' cultural perspective on sexual behaviour" (Edelman 98). The myth of gay male anal intercourse as the "fundamental point of origin" (Jim Finnegan quoted in Edelman 98) of AIDS recirculates as what Edelman calls "the most significant fiction our culture has produced in its efforts to understand 'AIDS'" (98). This "history," the decomposition of the subject in the act of anal intercourse, and "the gay male anus as a site of pleasure," then, "gives birth to 'AIDS' as figuration of death" (Edelman 99). In evoking this "history," however, the mirror also presents an opportunity for the construction of an "inwardly directed" (Edelman 107) form of activism – one in which inward responses to AIDS, that is,

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that the mirror invariably shows me . . . . I would've had to succeed, as the height or the renunciation of narcissism, in loving it" [223]). Düttman argues that AIDS provides a paradigm for "coming to oneself" (14) in Guibert's work. Reflecting upon the implications of one's reflection in the mirror certainly lends itself to this notion. For a further discussion of Guibert's novels and their "topoi of self-reflection," see Düttman, pages 13-17.

responses that appear to turn toward the "self" instead of outward and toward "others" (Edelman 106), would cease to be understood as narcissistic and therefore apolitical. Faced with "choosing" a role within the ideologically imposed binarism of "activity"/"passivity," choosing between "emulat[ing] widespread heterosexual contempt for the image of a gay sexuality represented as passive and narcissistic in order to embrace . . . the power of the tanks beneath which [gay men] would lie" (Edelman 109), gay men can recognize in the mirror the possibility of escaping this binarism by "deny[ing] the incompatibility of passivity and power" (Edelman 109). While I do not want to suggest that Peck's use of the mirror and its many reflections is plainly meant to create an "inwardly directed" form of activism, I will argue that Peck uses his gay male characters' encounters with their reflections to negotiate simultaneously stigmatized notions of gay male narcissism as passive and dominant AIDS activist discourse that reinforces such stigmatization in its call for an activist identity.

Near the end of *Martin and John*, in a brief italicized chapter called "Circumnavigation," the first-person narrator, John, describes the sounds of his lover, Martin, struggling with the illnesses of last-stage AIDS as he finishes bathing. And as Martin suffers, John encounters his own reflection:

> *Water was draining from Martin's bath, and threads of mist hung in the air. I'd finished shaving. I was almost ready to help him from the tub when a long fart bubbled out of the water, filling the bathroom with sound and smell. Didn't know you still had it in you, I said without turning, and I washed the shaving cream off my face. Then I heard flesh slide in the tub, followed by a thump and the sound of splashing water. Quietly, Martin said my name. The word hung in the damp smelly air before falling on my shoulder, and something, some unexpected weight, made me study my face in the mirror before I responded to him, as if this would be the last time I'd ever see it.* (163)

As part of an italicized chapter, free, therefore, from the conventions of narrative that would

require a larger circumstantial context, a context that could threaten the potency and urgency of this description by drawing attention away from Martin's illness, this passage constitutes one of the novel's most striking representations of the physical "realities" of AIDS. Refusing to mask the reality of the physical annihilation of gay men by AIDS, the passage participates in an AIDS activist practice of "breaking the silence" (Crimp and Rolston 14). Yet, read outside the rest of the novel and the novel's other representations of AIDS, supporters of the AIDS activist aesthetic might suspect Peck of attempting to appeal to the reader's "humanist pathos to stir reluctant . . . sympathies" (Watney, "Representing" 179) in representing a person with AIDS in a state of such extreme physical debilitation ("Representing" 179). I would argue, rather, that this passage demonstrates that the line between what constitutes an AIDS activist representation or a supposed "counter-representation" and a non-activist and/or a dominant cultural representation is not necessarily a distinct one.

While the passage does indeed portray Martin in a state of severe physical incapacity, the description of him is constructed, interestingly, through an appeal to the reader's senses of sound, smell, and touch more than to the conventional appeal to sight.[11] We feel the "mist," hear and smell the "fart," listen to Martin's flesh "slide" and his body "thump" and "splash." The reader is asked to imagine AIDS through the sounds and smells that Martin's body produces. The body, thus, becomes one of the distinctive sites of the articulation of AIDS. AIDS rewrites the body (Edelman 114).

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[11] Having said this, it is interesting to note that Simon Watney, in "Representing AIDS," uses photography to theorize the requisite practices of an AIDS activist aesthetic. Is an artistic medium that is so dependent upon the audience's visual reception of the work an adequate medium with which to theorize an AIDS activist art or "cultural practice"?

I suggest that the body is "*one* of the distinctive sites of the articulation of AIDS" because we cannot ignore John's response to his own perception of Martin's body as a site of the articulation of AIDS. John's turning to the mirror to study his face after describing for the reader his perception of Martin's body and illness is, I want to suggest, an act of creating another site of the articulation of AIDS. There occurs here through the mirror a redirection of the reader's gaze from Martin to John. This redirection does not diminish the import of the passage's representation of the physical devastation of AIDS, but it does signal that the impact of AIDS, physical and otherwise, might also be seen in John. In the face of AIDS, John reflects upon his own image, his own self. This impulse or need to reflect on, to contemplate one's self is figured as an effect of AIDS. Martin, as a manifestation of AIDS, reminds John of his own mortality and under this circumstance of being "bound of time" (Düttman 15) John seeks his self, that which constitutes the time of living.

The mirror as a site of the articulation of AIDS also occurs in a scene in a later chapter called "Lee." In this chapter, in which italicized script and plain script intertwine to destabilize further the identity of the narrator, the body as a site of the articulation of AIDS and AIDS's rewriting of the gay male body, is made even more blatant than in "Circumnavigation":

> He looked up and saw me in the mirror. Come here, he said. I walked to him. Stand behind me, he said. He pulled me so close that my chest pressed against his back and his hair tickled my nose. Then he bent his head to the side and I saw my head in the mirror perched above his body and I knew what he was doing, but I stood there and let him do it. Look carefully, he said, and I looked at his drooping nipples and the lines of his ribs and his ashen skin and my face. This is going to be you one day, he said. And I hope it's soon. (194)

Transformations of the body, while implicit in the person who has AIDS, in this case another

character named Martin, are also anticipated in his currently uninfected lover, John. It is, then, in the mirror that the promise and the threat of bodily transformation, a rewriting, appears for both narrators. Looking in the mirror, the narrators in the above passages can be understood as reflecting upon, and a reflection of, the "history" of gay male subjectivity, as I described above, and its relationship to the dominant causal explanation of AIDS. Each character, except for Martin who cannot see into the mirror from the bathtub, recognizes or seeks to recognize something about his relationship, as a gay male subject, to AIDS. No one looks away. Both narrators named John, in fact, are compelled to look into the mirror: "*some unexpected weight, made me study my face in the mirror*" (163); "I knew what he was doing, but I stood there and let him do it. . . . I looked at his drooping nipples and the lines of his ribs and his ashen skin and *my face*" (emphasis mine; 194). Because both narrators are thus far physically unaffected by AIDS, I want to suggest that their impulses to look in the mirror and their subsequent reflection are not so much "counternarcissistic confrontations," as Edelman asserts, but are rather "narcissistic confrontations" that at once recognize and resist the dominant history that has constructed gay male subjectivity and construed AIDS as the "gay disease" and the consequence of "irresponsible" gay sex (Edelman 114). This is not to dispute Edelman's characterization of the mirror as the place of "discursive compulsion to reflect on the history" (114) of what has been constructed as the gay male subject and its relation to AIDS. Both Johns, in fact, evoke this "history" in their acknowledgment of the potential of their reflection to be a "counternarcissistic confrontation," that is, to be bodily rewritten by AIDS. In "Circumnavigation," John describes his "study[ing]" his face "as if this would be the last time [he'd] ever see it" (163). Likewise, John's consciousness of the

potential implications of Martin's rewritten body on his own body, make the mirror a possible site for his own "counternarcissistic confrontation." Yet, in studying themselves, even if held by the "unexpected weight" (163) of AIDS, the narrators demonstrate a kind of narcissistic ability to stand and look in the face of AIDS. In this way, then, we might suggest that Peck's use of the self-reflexive images of mirrors allows for the possibility of the reinscription of the gay male subject as a subject, that is, as one who can position himself in relation to AIDS.

As a self-reflexive image, however, the mirror must be considered also as a strategic metafictional technique. The metafictional text, after all, is theorized as a kind of mirror itself – reflecting, not mimetically reproducing, parts of its own constitution and experience (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* 42). I want to suggest, then, that John's reflection in "Circumnavigation" has a role in revealing the structural framework of the novel. More specifically, his feeling that "this would be the last time [he'd] ever see [his face]" (163) suggests a kind of narrative erasure of John or of the incarnation of John as this particular character. It foreshadows, in other words, the narrative mirroring that will force the reader to interpret recursively the entire novel.

The narrative mirroring to which I refer occurs explicitly, shortly after "Circumnavigation," in the second to last chapter of the novel. In a plain-type chapter called "Fucking Martin," John describes he and Susan planning and attempting to engage in sexual intercourse. The encounter has a "practical purpose," though: "Tonight, I'm not her lover" (215), John tells the reader, "I'm just helping her have a baby" (215). During the scene of actual physical intimacy (there is a long "scene of seduction," filled mostly with memories of Martin, leading up to this moment), Susan addresses John as "Dale" (219). "More precisely,

she whispers the name as a question in response to what is apparently a pause in their lovemaking" (Champagne 179). The name "Dale" is not used in any other chapter and the novel, not surprisingly, makes no attempt to explain the apparent slip. Perhaps the incident would not be so striking if the first name of the author were not Dale and if, after Susan's question, the narration did not switch into third-person:

> Mouth open, teeth resting against Susan's inner thigh just above her knee, I stop what I'm doing as I realize I'm crying. My body trembles slightly. I feel, don't see, Susan's head lift up. "Dale?" she whispers.
>
> Then John puts his hand on her pussy, where soon he will insert his dick and for all intents and purposes plant his seed; . . . She can't see his face or the tears streaming down it. (219)

Susan's question is the apparent evocation of author or author-figure "Dale" into the novel. But "Dale"'s role is further complicated when, in the following paragraph, continuing to describe John and Susan making love, the narrator (John? Dale? Dale Peck?) refers to himself as "I" and informs the reader that John's face "is just a mask for mine" (220; Champagne 181). "I" appears to be "Dale," and "John" appears to be a character that the narrator/author "Dale" has invented "to allow him to tell his story" (Champagne 181). At the end of the chapter the narrator/author ("Dale"?) reveals, "Inevitably, things have been left out. Perhaps they appear in others' stories. Perhaps they were here once and John's forgotten them. Perhaps some things he remembers didn't really occur" (220).[12] At the very end of the chapter, the narrator confesses, "I thought I'd controlled everything so well, the plants,

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[12] In asserting that "Perhaps they [the things left out] appear in others' stories" we might suggest that the narrator/author is connecting his experiences of AIDS and of writing about those experiences with a larger body of AIDS literature or AIDS activism. This assertion, however, also forces the reader to consider what things have been left out as well as what things have been represented.

Martin, John, Susan. Even the semen" (221). This admission seems to support the reading of "Dale" as the author or inventing narrator figure and John as a character invented by Dale to narrate Dale's stories.

The entry of the author figure or narrator into the text is a common metafictional strategy (Waugh 14). At this late point in *Martin and John* the intrusion[13] affects the narrative at several levels. Paradoxically, "Dale"'s explicit entrance into the novel reminds the reader that what is generally taken to be "reality" is in fact constructed and mediated through authorial and societal discourses (Waugh 16). The exposition of the novel's "reality" as constructed, of course, offers a "model for understanding the contemporary experience of the world as a construction, an artifice" (Waugh 9). I describe this effect as paradoxical because in evoking the name "Dale," Peck invites the reader to ponder, at least momentarily, the "truth" of what we have just read. The principal effect, however, is the integration of the reader into the text. Not only is the reader definitively forced to "acknowledge the artifice, the 'art,' of what he [sic] is reading" (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* 5), but, paradoxically, he or she is asked to engage in the creation of the work's meaning (Hutcheon, *Narcissistic* 7). As Linda Hutcheon characterizes the "narcissistic narrative," this is the metafictional text's own paradox: it is "both narcissistically self-reflexive and yet focused outward, oriented toward the reader" (*Narcissistic* 7). The imposition of "Dale," the third-person narrator (found no where else in the work), and his subsequent authorial position as "I" disrupts an already

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[13] I refer to the occurrence of "Dale?" in the novel as an "intrusion" not as a necessary evocation of an inside/outside spatial metaphor, but rather more as a temporal metaphor. In much the same way that narrator "Dale?" "divides [his] life in two: before Martin, and after Martin" (222), it seems that the evocation of "Dale?" asks the reader to divide the novel: before "Dale?" and after "Dale?"

discontinuous narrative as well as an already discomforted reader. I do not mean to suggest that the entry of the narrator/author into the text is the only way in which the audience's conventional practice of reading is challenged or the only way *Martin and John* manifests itself as fiction. The novel, in fact, announces itself as fiction in the very first chapters, most visibly, with the variation of italicized and plain script (Champagne 181). My intention, instead, is to emphasize this moment of seemingly authorial intervention as the *further* and severe unsettling of all we have read and understood. The reader is left to interpret recursively the novel's events and representations. This metafictional technique is indeed a fitting and effective strategy with which to challenge dominant representations and rhetoric of AIDS and of homosexuality. After all, the reader is forced to recognize the construction of "reality," itself a creation of dominant culture. Peck's metafictional strategy functions in accordance with Watney's criteria of the AIDS activist aesthetic in its exposition and exploration of the constructedness of representation (Watney, "Representing" 173).

What I find inconsistent and troublesome about interpreting Peck's metafictional strategies as subversive of dominant discourse and therefore continuous with an AIDS activist aesthetic, however, is the AIDS activists' vested interest in not only the representation of AIDS as a "reality," but also in portraying the various "realities" of AIDS. The words of Watney perhaps best illustrate my concern: "It is our [AIDS activists'] ability to bring AIDS home as a reality to those who continue to disavow its magnitude, and even its very reality, that is the urgent task at hand" (168).[14] Furthermore, the "AIDS activist cultural practice"

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[14] Watney concludes the essay from which I am quoting, "Representing AIDS," by asserting that the calls of the AIDS activists for "reality" do not constitute a "return to a crude realist aesthetic" (189). Writing specifically about the role of photography in the

(Watney, "Representing" 173) calls for the exposition of "the complex reality" (Watney, "Representing" 173) masked by dominant rhetoric and representation as well as "counter-representations" (Crimp, "AIDS Cultural Analysis" 14) that illustrate the "reality" of AIDS. And even illustrating the "reality" of AIDS, as I have implied earlier, approaches contradiction. There is an urgency to demonstrate the physical annihilation of people by AIDS – the "reality" – as well as a call to demonstrate people *living* with AIDS – another "reality." This is not to say that these two "realities" are incompatible: people do indeed live with

AIDS and people do indeed die of AIDS. But around the question of how to represent AIDS, the AIDS activist aesthetic seems unable to represent simultaneously the urgency of the crisis without evoking the AIDS = death equation and unable to represent simultaneously people living productively with AIDS and the urgency of the crisis. Employing metafictional strategies that constantly call into question the validity of their own representation, however, we need to ask what happens to the representations of AIDS in *Martin and John*. Do the challenges to conventions of representation, in other words, undermine any potential activist representation? I want to address these questions not simply by examining representations of AIDS that may or may not be construed under the rhetoric of the AIDS activist aesthetic as activist. Rather, I want to examine passages that explicitly evoke a relationship between fiction and sex and/or AIDS. Such representations necessarily remind us of the metafictional form of the novel while reestablishing a context in which to explore Peck's reconsideration

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"AIDS activist aesthetic" he contends that photography "can intervene at the level of fantasy, in order to mobilise our grief and our anger to a collective purpose" (189).

of the gay male subject.

Fiction and Fucking

Perhaps the most troubling relation between "fiction and fucking" and most troubling sexual encounter in the novel is the one I have already begun to describe in my discussion of the chapter entitled "Fucking Martin."[15] John's heterosexual intercourse with Susan, especially at the end of the novel and with such dramatic effect (the evocation of the narrator/author figure and its subsequent destabilization of the narrative), is particularly unsettling because of the high value placed on gay men and their sexual relations throughout the book. Heterosexual relationships, usually as exhibited by John's parents or step-parents, are seldom rewarding and are often abusive. Yet, like the evocation of "Dale?" during this scene, one wonders whether heterosexual sex is somehow meant to be a recuperative gesture rather than have its usual destructive effect. My initial reaction to being perturbed by this heterosexual sex was to wonder if, by the end of the novel, the reader had "normalized" male-male erotic encounters. I thought that we might thus consider the inclusion of this heterosexual sex to be a strategic demonstration of the usual pervasiveness of heterosexism. This interpretation, however, paradoxically reveals my own assumptions of heteronormativity. And, my contemplations are particularly upset by Peck's identification of his intended and actual audience as gay men (Bronski). While I cannot pretend to "imagine myself" as a gay

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[15] The novel is, in fact, titled *Fucking Martin* in Britain (O'Toole 25). Thus, as John Champagne contends, this chapter has particular importance to the novel as a whole (202). Furthermore, there is a sense of ambiguity about the meaning of "fucking." Champagne notes that it can be "either a gerund or an adjective – further adding to the 'undecidability' of the novel" (202).

male reader, I do wonder if, for Peck's intended audience, this scene of heterosexual sex and the weight it is afforded undermine the validity or the relevance and importance of male-male sexual intimacy in the novel.[16] But wouldn't Peck, as conscious of his audience as he claims to be and a gay man himself realize this potential danger?[17] Why has Peck chosen to have John fucking Susan, not Martin, in this chapter?

Part of the answer to this question is that John's (or "Dale"'s) sex with Susan actually permits him to remember "fucking Martin":

> [W]hen the silence becomes uncomfortable [between Susan and I], we kiss, and then, for just a moment, I hear water running somewhere close by.
>
> Sometimes sex is perfect. I remember my fourth time with Martin, the first time we fucked. I remember the fourth time because that's when I fell for him. Something held us back our first three times; our minds were elsewhere, our hands could have been tied. But the fourth time. There we were: Martin's place, Martin's old couch. There we were: Martin and John. . . . [I thought] only of the amazing sensation of having this man inside me. A funny thing happened then. He pumped and I rocked, and I rocked and he pumped, and eventually our rhythm must have been just right, for the rug, a small Persian carpet-type thing patterned in tangled growing vines, came out from under us as if it had been pulled. I fell over, he slipped out of me, we ended up on our sides, side by side, laughing. (210, 212)

In all of its explicitness and the prefacing proclamation of perfect sex, this passage is a celebration of gay male sexuality (Brophy 180) and, as such, is befitting of Peck's project of

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[16] I say that I cannot "imagine myself" as a gay male reader and I do believe this to be true, but, it is interesting to note that according to dominant discourse, as a heterosexual female I occupy a similar subject position as the gay man, that is, as an object. Being the "passively," "receptively" "penetrated" "object of pleasure" for a man, I too have apparently "abdicated power" (Bersani 212-13). Can this "abdication" possibly affect the position from which I read and understand representations of male-male sex?

[17] Peck discusses his gay male audience in a 1995 on-line article by Michael Bronski called "Troubles in Mind: Novelist Dale Peck isn't Satisfied with Success." The article appears on the *Boston Phoenix* website at <www.bostonphoenix.com/alt1/archive/1in10/01-96/DALE_PECK.html>.

interjecting the desire of the gay male subject into the discourse of activist art. Despite the celebratory laughter that follows the interruption of intercourse, however, having the rug pulled out from underneath them, or, more accurately, pulling the rug out from underneath themselves is a foreboding image. It seems to suggest an ultimate unsustainability of male homosexuality. Moreover, the image implies that such inability to endure is self-induced. Invoked here, then, is the dominant construction of the gay male subject, unable to resist himself, as the passive receptacle of his own death, AIDS. Martin and John, however, laugh after the rug slips out from under them "for a long time" (212) and, then, more importantly, they "finish on [Martin's] bed" (212). Renewing intimacy and intercourse, then, they resist this dominant concept of the gay male subject as "lethally narcissistic" (Edelman 105) and John's celebration of sex with Martin continues.

It is, nonetheless, significant that this triumph, even if temporary, over dominant discourse and construction of the gay male subject, occurs within the frame of heterosexual sexual intimacy with Susan. Why does heterosexual sex allow John the space to remember and to celebrate his sexual experiences with Martin when, in the previous chapter, "Lee," the narrator has sex with another man to escape memories of Martin? The narrator speaks to a spectrally present Martin, "I want to scream mindlessly, Will nothing make you go away?" (193). If the gay man "abdicates power" (Bersani 212) (i.e. forfeits his subjectivity and becomes an object) in allowing himself to be penetrated, does John recover lost subjectivity in becoming the "active" penetrant? And is it this subjectivity that allows him to remember or construct memories of sex with Martin? While I am not certain that there are definitive answers to these questions, I do think that the narrative moments immediately preceding the

metafictional change in narration (from first-person to third-person and then to another first-person unmasked by Susan's evocation of narrator/author figure "Dale"), which are also the moments leading up to John's "active" penetration of Susan, help to reframe our understanding of this strange heterosexual encounter:

> We weren't prepared for this – any of this. . . . Here, today, the equations are changed: silence equals death, they teach us, and action equals life. And though I no longer question these anymore, I sometimes wonder, Whose death? Whose life?
>
> Martin's life resided in his right hand. He pointed it out to me with his left; his right hand rested on my thigh and he said: Look. I looked for a long time and then, just when I was about to ask what I was looking for, I saw it, his pulse, visibly beating in the blue trace of a vein in the patch of skin where his thumb and forefinger met. For a moment I considered pressing my own finger on it, as a joke. I don't remember if this was before or after we knew he had AIDS. I don't remember if I put my finger on the vein.
>
> Mouth open, teeth resting against Susan's inner thigh just above her knee, I stop what I'm doing as I realize I'm crying. . . . 'Dale?' she whispers.
>
> Then John puts his hand on her pussy, where soon he will insert his dick and for all intents and purposes plant his seed. (219)[18]

In addition to the unsettling evocation of "Dale" in this passage, there are other peculiarities that get buried by the complexity of Susan's question. Among them, the simultaneous intimacy between and disconnection of Susan and John in this scene contributes to the puzzling character of heterosexual sex in the novel. Is John, for example, doing one thing and feeling another ("I stop what I'm doing when I realize I'm crying") because he is attempting

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[18] This is one of the few places in the novel where AIDS is explicitly named as such. In an article entitled "Refusing the Name: The Absence of AIDS in Recent American Gay Male Fiction," James W. Jones suggests that the refusal to mention "AIDS" in a text nonetheless concerned with AIDS is a strategic device meant to also refuse the cultural connotations of the term. He also argues that it is unnecessary for a work of "gay male fiction" to employ the term "AIDS" because the dominant discourse, which equates homosexuality with AIDS (229), makes it implicit. In *Martin and John*, the absence of the term forces the reader to construct the significance of descriptions of, for example, Martin distracting John from tasting his cum (212-13). In this way, then, the absence of "AIDS" contributes to an already co-creative reading practice.

to *perform* heterosexuality or is it because he cannot separate his feelings for Susan from his feelings for Martin? What so severely disconnects Susan from John during seemingly intimate contact that makes her evoke "Dale?"?

The phrase "plant his seed" is also intriguing in its echo (or reappropriation?) of dominant, heterosexual rhetoric of sexual reproduction. It attributes to the gay male subject, John, fertility. It is difficult to know how to read this turn of phrase and its apparent connotation of fertility. On the one hand, because John is the "penetrant," dominant discourse, as I have suggested, might "grant" him subjectivity and thus "fertility" and potency would follow as part of dominant, heterosexual construction of the heterosexual man. But if the reader is meant to remain aware of John as a gay man, which the intertwined memories of Martin suggest, then we might contend that the assertion of fertility is meant to be part of Peck's reconstitution of the gay male subject. On the other hand, the notion of the gay male subject as "fertile" seems somewhat reminiscent of the AIDS activist rhetoric in its redeployment of the ideology of dominant discourse. In other words, how would it be necessarily "resistant" or subversive for a gay man to be considered "fertile" when "fertility" evokes the ideology of the subject as the heterosexual male?

The notion of John being "fertile" in this heterosexual encounter – the implication being that there will be a favourable product – is also troubling when we consider his contemplation of the "product of fucking Martin" only two pages earlier. Recalling his discovery of unlaundered bed sheets, still wet from Martin's fever, now "with a thin green layer of mold," John tells us, "I didn't know what to think: if this was the product of fucking Martin, or if this was the product of nothing, or, worst of all, if this, the product of fucking

Martin, was nothing" (217). Why, when most of the heterosexual relationships in the novel are violent or otherwise painful, does Peck suggest the possibility of fertility with Susan and John and leave us to ponder the product of Martin and John's relationship as "nothing"?

Returning to the heterosexual sexual encounter, we recognize that as the moment in which John is expected to "penetrate" Susan approaches, the celebrations of Martin and John's sexuality increasingly diminish. The proximity of the moment of penetration and the explicit articulation of AIDS are parallel. Each threatens John's subject position as a gay man as reconstituted by the celebration of his sexuality. The intriguing culmination of these threats is John's and/or Dale's tears: "Now I wonder, Has this story liberated anything but my tears? And is that enough? I want to ask. To which I can only answer, Isn't that enough?" (220-21). Threatened by erasure, the narrator "narcissistically" responds by asserting the validity of his tears. This gesture, it seems to me, exemplifies Peck's negotiation of an "inwardly directed" form of activism. The narrator's response to his own questions about the value of the liberation of his tears ("Isn't that enough?") posits his attempt to mourn Martin's death; his telling the "story" of his relationship with Martin is a necessary and productive practice.

The complexities of the metafictional techniques in *Martin and John* paradoxically constantly threaten to obliterate any coherent representations of the gay male subject and of AIDS the reader may be able to construct upon the text's own invitation. There is a temptation to read the metafictional strategy as a reflection of the "profound unimaginable[ness]" (Yingling 291) of AIDS. That is, we are tempted to understand the book's complexity as exemplified by its fragmentary narratives and non-linearity as a reflection of the enormity of the challenge AIDS poses to our understanding of sexuality,

subjectivity, life, and death. The apparent chaos of the novel's structures parallels the chaos of AIDS. As Thomas Yingling contends, "the frames of intelligibility that provide [AIDS] with even a meager measure of comprehensibility are notoriously unstable" (292). Yet, simultaneously, the multiplicities of metafiction – the mirroring, the constructing, the revealing – invite the reader to imagine AIDS in innumerable ways. Thus, once again, the practice of reading may become a site of activism. But rather than foreground this possibility, Peck emphasizes the necessity of responding to the question of how we should represent AIDS from an alternative space. In the last chapter of *Martin and John*, in italicized script, told, as usual, by a first-person narrator, who may still be the voice of "Dale" or once again the voice of "John" (if we still care to make a distinction), the narrator articulates an intriguing need for a "middle ground": "Everything tells me that if I want to survive I have to find a middle ground, a place where I can stand and not feel as if on one side a sea rages to consume me and on the other a vast open prairie waits deceptively to engulf me in immense emptiness" (228). In the "middle ground" of *Martin and John* – between a consuming dominant discourse and a deceptively "open" activist aesthetic – Peck constructs a gay male subject that, through pleasures and politics, could survive AIDS in all of its incarnate imaginations and representations.

Conclusions

In concluding this thesis I need to return to the question with which I began the work. For its addressees have now multiplied. "Of what does the duty, the responsibility, of the witness consist who thinks and talks about AIDS?" (Düttman 69).

The question still pertains, of course, to the writers whose texts I have explored here. As I have shown, each writer understands his or her role as a witness to HIV and AIDS as constitutive of different responsibilities. Thus, each writer attempts to produce a different effect, or rather a different set of effects, in the reader. Hoffman, in recounting her own narrative of mourning, necessarily engages the reader in a practice of mourning. We cannot refuse to mourn the Michael she gives to us in this text any more than she can refuse him. She understands her responsibility as the shaping of the reader as mourner. Yet, Derrida's "unbearable paradox of fidelity" ("By Force" 187) succinctly reminds the reader of the simultaneous absolute impossibility and necessity of mourning. By beginning with this paradox, I mean to have signalled parallel impossibilities and necessities in all of the responsibilities, responses, and representations of AIDS that these writers figure. Again, for example, in the second chapter, in exploring Jarman's diary as a place of his and the reader's signature, we encounter the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of fidelity to the dead through the signature. Furthermore, it is in this chapter, through reading *Modern Nature* through Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo* and Derrida's reading/signing of it, that I have perhaps best

illustrated the writer's ability to reproduce in the reader what he understands as his responsibility in witnessing HIV and AIDS. Or rather, it is Jarman's call for us to sign his text, to let him live in us, that best demonstrates the utmost importance of the reader in witnessing AIDS. And finally, in the third chapter I hope to have illuminated a more conventionally activist discourse in examining specific narrative representations of HIV and AIDS in *Martin and John* as the negotiation of counter-representations and representations produced by dominant culture. The reader, although less of a focus in this chapter, is in no way exempt from the kind of interiorization of the responsibilities of witnessing AIDS evidenced by the first two chapters. We are, rather, through the novel's self-reflexive form invited to interpret recursively not only all that occurs in the narrative, but also to contemplate the difference between what constitutes AIDS activist representations and so-called mainstream or dominant cultural representations of HIV and AIDS.

Having demonstrated what Hoffman, Jarman, and Peck understand as their responsibilities in witnessing AIDS, and subsequently what responsibilities they interiorize in the reader, I re-read the question with which I began as a question that is now necessarily addressed to me. As one who, in this thesis, thinks and writes about HIV and AIDS *vis-à-vis* these writers' witnessing, I too have become a witness and I too exhibit this responsibility here in writing. Moreover, according to the contract between the writer and the reader to which this thesis so often alludes, I now ask my reader, the witness to my own witnessing of HIV and AIDS, to ask the same question.

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