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The City of Brotherly Love: Sex, Race, and AIDS in *Philadelphia*

The film *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1994) can seem unfamiliar to the very audience it pretends to include and therefore to address (namely, a gay audience, an HIV-infected audience). While the cast includes characters that some gay and marginal audiences might be expected to recognise (Michael Callen, the singing group the Flirtations, Quentin Crisp, the off-Broadway performers Ron Vawter, Anna Deavere Smith, David Drake, and Karen Finley), as well as some of the real symptoms and medications, the film's viewpoints, *mises-en-scène*, and themes suggest that the fundamental audience identification will be with those characters who are ambivalent or intolerant of AIDS and homosexuality, not those who are gay, infected, and ill. We in the audience identify with the sympathisers, with the tolerant; if we are mean and closed-minded, or even just ambivalent about homosexuality, we identify with Joe Miller (Denzel Washington), who is homophobic and taught over the film's narrative to be a little less so; if we are magnanimous and goodhearted we might identify with Andy's mother (which is to say, with

Joanne Woodward), who cannot help crying when she is on the phone to, in the court house with, or at the bedside of her always dying son.

***Philadelphia*: Accommodation**

The film *Philadelphia* accommodates anxiety about homosexuality and illness by claiming to challenge, but actually reinscribing, popular misconceptions about AIDS. Gabriele Griffin comments that “the film has to pander to the anxieties of those who regard homosexuality as deviant.”¹ *Philadelphia* has been described by Amy Taubin as a “women’s picture crossed with a courtroom drama,”² in which a young successful attorney is fired from his position with an important Philadelphia law firm when the partners discover he has AIDS. Indeed, *Philadelphia* attempts to resolve the tension of three genres: courtroom drama, romantic melodrama, and family melodrama. Rather than challenging popular ideas about AIDS and homosexuality, *Philadelphia* exploits these genres to re-create and reinscribe the public’s attitudes and misconceptions: for example, that AIDS is exclusively a gay illness (and conversely that it is not, but that only gay people bear responsibility for their illness; others are “innocent”), that HIV is contagious (rather than infectious), that you can tell who has AIDS (and conversely that you cannot tell, but ought to be able to), and that there is no gay community.³ What the film does do successfully and unintentionally, I propose, is combat and confront unaccepting attitudes and prejudices about race. It does this indirectly and passively, mainly through the audience’s expected identification with Joe Miller in a way that erases the need for any racial identification (or dis-identification). The film’s unspoken

assumptions about race displace attempts to rewrite conceptions of AIDS and homosexuality.

The gestures in *Philadelphia* that could be seen to combat or confront unaccepting attitudes among the public about AIDS and homosexuality only serve to confirm these attitudes. Because the film *Philadelphia* is itself an exception (“the first major Hollywood movie to deal with Aids since the disease was first recognised in the US in 1981”⁴), and because the gestures and images and speeches valorising homosexuality and explaining AIDS are highlighted as anomalies and exceptions, the audience is treated to nothing more than an example of what some few exceptional homosexuals or people with AIDS might be like. Although “much of the success of *Philadelphia* depends on marrying the audience to Hanks’s character as he transforms himself into the good through suffering,”⁵ the movie actually succeeds in marrying the audience to Joe—Andy’s homophobic lawyer—who moves but inches in his disrespect for homosexuals. By the end of the film he feels for Andy (Tom Hanks)—feels sorry for him—as, probably, does the audience, but as an anomaly. There is no reason provided by the film narrative to believe that Joe would behave any differently if someone made a pass at him, as the young athlete does one night in the drugstore, which disgusts him and incites him nearly to violence, or if given a hard time in a bar by his buddies, as occurs in the film when Joe’s friends tease him about turning queer (a little “light in the sneakers,” his associate Filco seems to be mockingly accusing him of). Joe responds, “Yeah, I am, Filco, I’m changing. I’m on the prowl, and I’m looking for a hunk, not just any hunk, but a man, a real man like you,” and then pretends to refer to the sex they enjoy together. Filco is angered and

embarrassed at Joe's innuendoes. Finally, earnestly, Joe says, "look, these people make me sick, but a law has been broken. You remember the law, don't you?" And so the film returns to its theme of justice, always balancing and justifying homosexuality with civil liberties. But not before the bartender can have his say: "At least we agree on one thing, Joe." "What's that?" Joe replies, looking up from his drink. "Those tutti-fruttis make me sick, too." Thus homophobia has the final word. When Joe is enlightened enough at the end of the film to adjust the dying Andy's oxygen mask, this is meant to stand for the development and maturity of this intolerant main character, and thus asks for such small measures from the viewing audience.

Double Message: Virulence and Harmlessness

The film *Philadelphia* continually turns on images and phrases that restate what the film is supposed to be about. Among the first words in the film, and the word by which Joe remembers how he and Andy know each other, is "innocuous." They are arguing a case in front of a judge about the pestilence of dust manufactured by the construction work of a company that Andy's firm represents. "Messy," Andy says, holding the white substance in his hand, "but innocuous." The film, throughout, considers whether AIDS is dangerous or harmless, starting with the most questionable substance, semen, for which this white powder can be read as a cinematic surrogate. On one hand, it is possible to read, especially through the film's use of multifarious babies, and particularly through Andy's holding and feeding his brother's baby at his parents' wedding anniversary celebration, that AIDS is harmless. But the film narrative also takes pains to voice every single misconception and bigotry

about AIDS—Walter (Robert Ridgely), one of the law partners, mutters at the trial, for example, “he asked for it”—without contradicting them. This same law partner exonerates a presumably more “innocent” victim of AIDS by expressing sympathy for a former colleague with HIV “who contracted the disease through no fault of her own.” Near the end of the film Joe is allowed an extended homophobic tirade in the guise of “informing” Andy about “what the general thinking [is] out there” about homosexuality. After a party that Andy and Miguel have thrown (in lieu of, but in anticipation of, Andy’s memorial service), Joe and Andy are going over Andy’s testimony for the trial the next day, when Andy is going to take the witness stand. Andy congratulates Joe, as they sit across a table late in the night, for attending what Andy presumes to be his first “gay party.” In response Joe laughs and reiterates the “truth” of what America thinks about homosexuality:

Let me tell you something, Andrew. When you’re brought up the way I am, the way most people are in this country, there’s not a hell of a lot of discussion about “homosexuality,” of, uh – what do you call it? – alternate lifestyles. As a kid you’re taught that queers are funny, queers are weird, queers dress up like their mother, that they’re afraid to fight, that they’re a danger to little kids, and that all they want to do is get into your pants.

To this Andy replies, “thank you for sharing that with me.” This conversation is followed by Andy’s melodramatic moment, his aria of life and death and hope and struggle, which is itself then followed by Joe’s far more normative (and, to a mainstream cinema-going audience, far more recognisable) family setting. The crazed life and dying of Andy (bathed in red light, clutching his IV drip, and channelling Maria Callas) is juxtaposed with the ordinary heterosexual life of Joe. Joe holds his baby. He clutches his wife. The strategy to put all perspectives on screen emphasizes a liberal acceptance of

all points of view without attempting to resolve the contradictions between prejudice and compassion, between queer and common.

While the recognition between Andy and Joe revolves around the word “innocuous,” Joe is at the same time visibly anxious and upset as soon as he learns that Andy has AIDS, and focuses, as the camera directs us, on Andy’s head, his baseball cap, his hand, as though each thing he touches is now going to be infected. That same afternoon Joe sees his medical doctor to reassure himself about his own immunity to AIDS and cinematically creates in the doctor an educator for the audience who reassures Joe that AIDS is not casually transmitted. Joe’s doctor, as the teacher for the audience, explains, “the HIV virus can only be transmitted through the exchange of bodily fluids, namely, blood, semen, and vaginal secretions.” But, Joe insists, what if they find out later that it is casually transmitted? Joe then flees the office, both insulted and warily amused when his doctor wants to give him a blood test. If he is worried that AIDS can be spread casually, then why is he so alarmed at the prospect of a blood test? Joe embodies the contradiction common to anxiety about AIDS: that it can be spread casually (which means a blood test would be practical) or only gay men and drug users can get it (which would render a blood test for Joe insulting). Thus it is the paradoxical paranoia about AIDS—that you *can* get it casually and that you *cannot* unless you are a homosexual or a drug user—that the movie reinforces and does not dispel. For every reassurance or piece of education in the film there is another accompanying image of danger or virulence to negate it. Printed on Joe’s office window, backwards to the audience, is a sign reading “toxic torts,” exaggerating once again the movie’s concern with infection and toxicity.

Sitting in front of this sign Joe refers to Andy's "dreaded deadly infectious disease." This is a long way from "innocuous," and much nearer to the general fear of deliberate and stigmatised infection.

AIDS and the American Dream

The film *Philadelphia* very strongly places its setting in the city of Philadelphia, the land of American freedom, of equal opportunity, and of liberty. Julius Erving, the former basketball player for the Philadelphia 76ers (known familiarly as "Dr. J") and Edward Rendell, the mayor of Philadelphia, each make an appearance. During the trial Joe extemporises to a television reporter, "We're standing here in the city of Brotherly Love, the birthplace of freedom, where the founding fathers authored the Declaration of Independence." Indeed, Andy in his work and lifestyle is the image of the American dream, which, the film's didactic narrative and *mise-en-scène* stress, can include being gay and can include AIDS. The film opens with a survey of the people of Philadelphia—black, white, walking, bicycling, at work, down and out. "You want this one?" the fish sellers ask, holding their wares up to the camera, implying choice and freedom. The world is mixed but open, black and white, full of possibilities, and even beautiful. AIDS is placed against a backdrop of life going on, life as we know it, life that anyone can relate to. This montage of ordinariness makes the everyday simultaneously consequential and insignificant. It also suggests that AIDS is an American problem. At the end of the opening credits the camera settles on the liberty bell and its visitors, a group of children of all races holding hands as they circle the bell. The bell is, famously, cracked. This will be a film, the opening

credit sequence announces with this last image, about justice and injustice in America.

The opening credits also remind us that there is something very emotional about everyday life, especially as a prelude to a film about dying. With Bruce Springstein's lyrics intoning suffering and inviting sympathy, the long introduction tries to establish a false equality, a false sense that this could happen to anyone. Death is not tragic here because Andy is a hero, the opening sequence suggests, but because he is the image of the American dream—something that even the poor and disenfranchised can apprehend—and he is dying of injustice. Not the injustice of the courtroom but the injustice of a system that is not equipped to respond to AIDS because it keenly discriminates against gays. The system also (and equally, the opening suggests) discriminates against black people, Latinos, drug users; however, the film does not bring these elements in. In this film not everyone is equal: everyone *e/se*, perhaps, but not “homosexuals.” Unusually, though, in this film being African-American is what is normal.

Soon after the opening credits, as Andy and Joe are leaving the judge's chambers in which they argue over the word “innocuous,” the camera lingers on the elevator doors as they close in front of them. Scratched on the elevator door is a piece of graffiti that announces, “No Justice, No Peace.” This was the slogan taken up in response to the Rodney King verdict in 1992 in which an all white jury in California acquitted two white policemen of vigorously beating a black motorist (Rodney King) apprehended for a minor offence. The reason the public response to this acquittal, especially among African-Americans, was so vocal was that the beating was captured on

videotape and broadcast repeatedly on television. The whole nation witnessed the beating and then was collectively apprised of the acquittal. “No justice, no peace” is a warning. If there is no justice for black people, the slogan threatens, there will be no peace. *Philadelphia* is a film about justice, about the pursuit of justice. Peace can refer to public civility but also to peace of mind, to tranquillity of spirit, to dying peacefully. Andy cannot die peacefully unless he gets justice. In the film he says, “I’m ready” (to die) just within hours of the verdict that justifies his suit against the law firm that fired him. But the film is also, as the scratched graffiti implies, about the justices gained and still unsatisfied for African Americans. Joe is meant to stand for your “average American Joe.” As Amy Taubin writes, “*Philadelphia* is a breakthrough film not only because it deals with Aids and homophobia, but because it is the first major non-action Hollywood movie in which a black man personifies mainstream America.”⁶ The film attempts to appeal to the liberal conscience of middle America through a narrative whose primary point of view requires identification with a black figure. In fact, “Joe’s homophobia is a sign of his normality.”⁷ The scene in the kitchen, in which Joe rants about his hatred of homosexuals, establishes Joe as “normal.” The audience is expected to relate to, and be relieved by, his confusion and alienation and unexamined contempt.

Anthea Burton, the company’s rising paralegal (Anna Deavere Smith), is the nexus of the film narrative’s two discriminations in that she is both a black woman and, as an associate of Andy’s, is testifying on his behalf. The camera’s low-angle medium-shot view of her creates a positive representation and gives her authority. When she explains that she has suffered

discrimination at the law firm from which Andy was fired her words are imparted as both truthful and funny. When she explains that Charles Wheeler (Andy's boss and father-figure, played by Jason Robards) wanted her to wear earrings that were less ethnic and more American, she responds that her earrings are American—they are “African-American.” This is so humorous that all parties, defence and prosecution, can laugh at it. It is not considered offensive—nor is it considered more than a mild indictment of Charles Wheeler—but it does underline the confusion about identity that the rest of the film displays and does not resolve. Anthea does not get treated as insolent, but by the camera as a divine being. The white HIV-infected woman who testifies before her—Mrs Benedict—was viewed with a slightly higher-angle shot, investing her with less authority than Anthea but creating some affinity with Andy and also granting her greater moral rectitude (she was infected by a blood transfusion). What Anthea has to say, the cinematography tells us, is the truth: “I think counsel tends to oversimplify the situation somewhat.”

When Andy seeks his family's consent to pursue the lawsuit against his firm, his mother has the family's final word when she announces that “I didn't raise my kids to sit in the back of the bus... you get in there and you fight for your rights,” alluding to the famous moment in black civil rights history when in 1955 Rosa Parks refused to relinquish her bus seat to a white passenger, challenging a law that allocated seats to African Americans only in the rear section of a public bus. This nexus of intolerance—against blacks and against gays—is produced more suggestively when Joe recognises “the essence of discrimination,” to which both he and Andy are subject, in the law library. That is when light dawns for Joe. They bond over reading legislation on

discrimination, each reading a part, like a love scene, as the music swells. The camera, in a style mimicking a shot-reverse-shot, conventionally associated with cinematic romance, by filming each of their faces in close up as they read, moves back and forth between them, and the scene ends with Joe incanting that the essence of discrimination is in “formulating opinions about others not based on their individual merits but rather on their membership in a group with assumed characteristics.”

When the film aligns the two discriminations, homophobia, or AIDSphobia (which the film merges) and racism, it does it in a way that assumes the absence of racism but never assumes the terribleness of homophobia. The film’s iconography invites the audience to make small steps, as Joe makes in the film, in battling their hatred of gays, but in the film there is no interrogation of racism; the assumption is that it should not—and does no longer—exist. The assumption is that the viewer should have no trouble, whoever the viewer is, identifying with a middle-class professional black man. This is revolutionary indeed, but not in the cause the film’s story is mired in apparently revolutionising.

Masculinity, Male Sexual Identity, and AIDS

The film focuses on the ways men relate to each other around issues of sexuality and identity, and exposes a cinematic ambivalence regarding representations of men and of male sexuality, particularly in the context of AIDS. There are no women in the film who think the disease is disgusting or harmful, no women, that is, who harbour misconceptions about AIDS. Even the defence attorney (Mary Steenburgen), defending the firm that fired Andy,

mutters under her breath toward the end of the trial, “I hate doing this case.” The film can have it both ways here: it shows equal opportunity in who is bad—and who are the topflight lawyers—but still women are sympathetic and veritably, underneath it all, good. Only men end up being homophobes or villains in this movie.

Indeed, Joe’s homophobia is a sign of his masculinity. In Joe’s kitchen rant against homosexuality, the audience is expected to relate to his confusion and alienation and unexamined contempt. Hilton Als writes of this sequence, “one of the more unintentionally painful scenes in the film is when Denzel Washington, as Hanks’s reluctant lawyer, explains why he’s a flaming homophobe. His wife—regardless of her well-intentioned speech about how aunt so-and-so and cousin doodah are gay—embraces him nonetheless for his valor.”⁸ In defending his hatred of gays Joe says, to his wife, in the privacy of their kitchen, while wielding a turkey leg, enacting the role of primal man, while knocking the fowl’s appendage against the baby bottle he is holding in his other hand, bashing, in effect, what is feminine and domestic, “You can call me old-fashioned, you can call me conservative, just call me a man,” implying that to be a man is naturally conjunctive with disgust for homosexuality. “Besides,” he adds, “I think you have to be a man to understand how really disgusting that whole idea is anyway.”

In a film that disallows any evidence of gay sexuality, Andy’s interaction with the film’s myriad metonymically phallic cigars is telling. He fondles his cigar when the law partners smoke theirs. He finally gets to light his cigar only when he is alone and after he has finished writing up an important complaint for the firm and leaving it late at night on the desk in his office. He cannot light

his cigar in front of others. He also is never seen smoking a cigar with his lover, which would make the imagery too suggestive, as suggestive as a kiss: “*Philadelphia* stops short of confronting straight viewers (to whom it is primarily addressed) with the kind of images that might trigger their homophobia.”⁹ The next scene in which we see Andy fondling a cigar is when he fondles Joe’s. Andy has come to Joe’s office to seek legal counsel; Joe looks on horrified and afraid when he learns Andy has AIDS and watches closely—as the camera shows us—Andy’s hand as he picks up a cigar from Joe’s desk. Joe watches in horror as Andy handles his cigar. The next scene has Joe rushing to his doctor to see if AIDS can be contracted from “casual” contact.

Confusions of sexual and gender identities in *Philadelphia* result in effeminising gay characters, particularly Andy, by adhering to cinematic genre conventions that render Andy’s role a traditionally female one, thereby asserting Andy as effeminate and further reinscribing public misconceptions about homosexuality. The film also (implicitly) makes a distinction between masculine men and feminine men (Joe wields a turkey leg and grunts; Andy wears makeup to cover his lesions), thus effeminising the gay men in this film. For a film that might be seen to be representing a gay man with AIDS authentically and unsterotypically, it does a lot to undermine its efforts. Besides that Andy holds a baby at his parents’ anniversary party, as generally in the film only women do, and the fact that due to the evidence of his Kaposi’s sarcoma lesions he has to learn to put on makeup, the film effeminises Andy by adhering to genre mechanisms that make Andy’s role feminine. Andy is effeminised, for one thing, simply by dying so

melodramatically. The film also makes Andy's role feminine because "cinematically, disease has usually been a female complaint.... A different scenario attends the male body, which is more likely to be wounded than it is diseased."¹⁰ And in the scene that most closely suggests a sexual encounter between Andy and his lover Miguel (Antonio Banderas), Andy gets penetrated by Miguel. The only sexual intimacy between Andy and Miguel can be read symbolically in the "penetration" scene: Miguel pushes a needle into a catheter in Andy's arm. When he pushes the needle through, Miguel lets out a sigh, a groan, "ahh..." But the needle is blocked, it needs to be flushed out; there can be no consummation. Miguel scalds his hand on something burning on the stove in a symbolic gesture of frustrated desire.

Finally, after Charles Wheeler and his partners in law are served with a summons the camera watches their backsides: they are made into vulnerable (homo)sexual prey after being slapped with a discrimination suit that will require them to prove their manliness. By looking at the men as sexual objects, this scene betrays an anxiety, particularly aroused by an AIDS narrative, that all men can be (made) gay. Charles refers to the "pathetic gay bars" that Andy might have frequented and knows that they are on Chestnut Street, while Bob Seidman (Ron Vawter), one of the partners, ever so discreetly cruises a man who is passing by "into" the camera, thereby "cruising" the viewer, making the viewer a (homo)sexual object for a moment as well. The focus on their backsides as they walk through a nether canal of the stadium is a reminder of "what we're talking about here," as Joe eloquently manages to remind us in the court scene (everyone "is thinking

about sexual orientation, who does what to whom and how they do it”) lest we forget that AIDS is everywhere and always about homosexuality.

Immediate Families

Philadelphia is a film of wedding rings and babies, as though the weight of homosexuality is so strong that it needs dramatic overcompensation to give the film a sense of balance. The film loses no opportunity to include a wedding band in a scene, as long as the wearer is heterosexual. We see Charles Wheeler’s wedding ring at his first appearance and then it fills the whole frame when he places his hand on the bible to testify; we see Joe’s as he picks up his baby after the terrifying opera scene (in which Andy takes on a satanic red glow and practically lip synchs—though he is actually translating—Maria Callas singing the death scene from Umberto Giordano’s opera *Chenier*), we see his wife’s ring when he crawls into bed with her; we see Andy’s mother’s wedding ring in her first appearance when she picks up the phone; we see Joe’s during the trial. The film abounds with them. Strangely, Andy himself wears a ring starting a few scenes into the film, but after that most scenes that have a shot of his hands obscure that finger (particularly when he is holding the baby). There is one moment in the film where the camera renders visible Andy’s ring on his left hand when he is also in an intimate connection with Miguel; this is when Andy is dying and looking up at his lover Miguel from his hospital bed. He can be “married” to Miguel now that he is dying. The scenes in which Andy’s left hand is actually bare of a ring are the establishing scenes: in his office, when he is at the doctor’s giving blood, when he is in the emergency room with his lover. Andy’s “marital status”

seems to fluctuate according to how threatening his sexuality might be to the viewing audience.

The film also employs all of its women of childbearing years to either bear children, to be pregnant, or to hold their newborns. Even the woman with AIDS who testifies at Andy's trial contracted HIV from a blood transfusion during childbirth. Joe and his wife are shown happy in bed in the hospital with their newborn baby. Andy's sister gives birth between Andy's death and his memorial service. Andy gets to borrow his brother's baby at the celebration of his parents' wedding anniversary. Douglas Crimp comments, "I didn't actually count them, but it seemed to me that there were more babies than queers in *Philadelphia*."¹¹

There are no other gay couples in this film. The *mise-en-scène* of the party manages to show only one figure of a couple dancing or to show a complete couple from above so it is not clear what the gender configuration of the couple might be. The camera manages to avoid showing any other couples just as the camera manages to avoid showing Andy's ring when it can be overtly connected to his being in a gay relationship, especially in this party scene when he is wearing gloves. No gay stereotypes are broken in this film. They are only reinforced by the portrayal of the relationship between Andy and Miguel as an *exception*. There are no other couples to act as a context, so their relationship just ends up looking unusual—like a singular gay relationship. *Philadelphia* shows no gay person with a job and a home and a life aside from Andy.

Conclusion

As the first (and arguably the only) mainstream film about AIDS, *Philadelphia* does little to change public misconceptions and prejudices about AIDS and about gay men. However, I would like to close by suggesting that even a movie at its most convincing would not effectively change the sentiments of its viewing audience.

The movies, even polemical movies, do not change people's minds, at least not in the way their creators might intend them to and not in the way we expect or hope them to. Rather, films reflect change as it has already transpired in the public imagination. Films give us what we are ready for. Films reflect the changes in thought and opinion already in progress in society and further reinscribe the thoughts and feelings—the sentiments—of a society. In fact, they do more, by so inscribing, to create stasis, for things to stay the same, than to change things. Gabriele Griffin comments that *Philadelphia* achieved mainstream status “in part by articulating a moral economy which is fundamentally conservative and, indeed, homophobic.”¹² Films resolve the dilemmas created by their narratives, but hardly the perplexities of life that are recapitulated in the films. The peripatetic ghost gets into heaven, the lonely man gets married, the killer gets caught, the mystery solved, but we—the viewers—are still left with our mortal anxiety, our gender confusion, our terror of disease, our sexual identity crisis.

When a pervasive public trauma upsets our fastidiously achieved (and delicately illusory) equilibrium about sex and death, pleasure and mortality, we must construct cultural paradigms of reassurance. *Philadelphia* is such a film, in which AIDS is featured but made palatable; Sarah Schulman is scathing in this regard when she writes that in mainstream representations of AIDS

“[v]iewers are protected from seeing people who are really sick, really angry, and really abandoned by the general public—the same public that the distributors feel dependent on for the film to make a profit.”¹³ Motion pictures—for their pure intentions to entertain and occasionally (and safely) to challenge less than tenaciously held conceptions within the public psyche, and because of their mass consumption (consumed not only through actual ticket sales and personal viewing, but also through widespread advertisements, trailers, and universal reviews)—are one of the primary vehicles for expressions and representations of societal, that is, collective, if personal, anxiety and for the formulaic and steady flow of reassurances. Mainstream movies are expressions of and passing antidotes to cultural and sociological trauma. Hollywood offers us an unfailing prescription of palliatives: love conquers evil (or quells it) or we learn that there are far worse problems and they have to do with other people, people who are in no way like us.

Pity can be a great antidote to cultural anxiety. Feeling sorry for someone else (which often translates as feeling relieved for yourself) is antithetical to feeling sorry for or afraid for yourself. However didactic a film may be—and however successfully the music swells to evoke sympathy and pity—no long-lasting shifts in political or cultural beliefs are wrought as long as the viewer continues to believe the trauma is happening—and can only happen—to someone else. Nothing in film will actually relieve anxiety. Melodrama is only ever entertainment; it does not function as motivation toward greater civil consciousness much less revolutionary fervour, and it is working most effectively as entertainment, and least as political provocation, when you cannot stop crying.

¹ Gabriele Griffin, *Representations of HIV and AIDS: Visibility Blue/s* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 189.

² Amy Taubin, "The Odd Couple" (*Sight and Sound* 4.3, 1994), 24.

³ See Sarah Schulman, who underlines the improbability that the Tom Hanks character "goes to a straight homophobic lawyer because there are no gay lawyers." This is "not only absurd," she writes, "but grossly ahistorical." Sarah Schulman, *Stagestruck: Theater, AIDS, and the Marketing of Gay America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 49.

⁴ Taubin, "The Odd Couple," 24. Taubin adds, "In that sense, it has been 13 years in the making and bears the burden of all the films that have not preceded it."

⁵ Hilton Als, "Since You Went Away" (*The Village Voice*, film supplement, 24 May 1994), 6.

⁶ Taubin, "The Odd Couple," 24.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Als, 6.

⁹ Taubin, "The Odd Couple," 24.

¹⁰ Manohla Dargis, "AIDS Against the Grain: Bodies at Risk from Everything but HIV" (*The Village Voice*, film supplement, 24 May 1994), 10.

¹¹ Douglas Crimp, "De-Moralizing Representations of AIDS," in *Melancholia and Moralism: Essays on AIDS and Queer Politics* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2002), 256.

¹² Griffin, 182.

¹³ Sarah Schulman, "Fame, Shame, and Kaposi's Sarcoma: New Themes in Lesbian and Gay Film," in *My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan/Bush Years* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 228.