

8-12-2014

Step Into a Blue Funk: Transversal Color and Derek Jarman's Blue

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STEP INTO A BLUE FUNK:
TRANSVERSAL COLOR IN DEREK JARMAN'S BLUE

by

DAREN FOWLER

Under the Direction of Angelo Restivo

ABSTRACT

Derek Jarman's *Blue* has a complicated reception and exhibition history. Stuck between his past representational queer cinema and the inability to represent the suffering and death from AIDS, Jarman crafted a film of radical stylistics. It is in *Blue's* striking color that a transversality of form, sensation, and visuality occurs, and in so doing, produces a space for synesthetic affectivity and collective desire. This thesis will use those radical formal elements and the history of Jarman and *Blue* to position color away from the phobic tradition of color theory and towards a flowing site of political rupture.

INDEX WORDS: *Blue*, Derek Jarman, Color, Transversality, Collective, Felix Guattari

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DAREN FOWLER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2014

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2014

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August 2014

To my grandfather, Harry Burnett Randall, III,
Your love and support were the greatest of gifts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I began down this blue path over five years ago while at Oklahoma State. Therefore, I must first thank Brian Price and Meaghan Sutherland for introducing me to *Blue*, experimental cinema, and the wonders of media studies. They continually pushed me to my intellectual breaking point, and that rigor and mentorship continues to define my work and person.

I want to thank my committee for ushering those wandering ideas of color into coherence and vibrancy. This project began by circulating around questions of phenomenology and without Jennifer Barker I would never have realized that my original idea had an impossible scope. Alessandra Raengo asked possibly the most important question, “Why representation?” Testing my abilities every step of the way, Alessandra showed me just how much I could accomplish. Finally, I am grateful to Angelo Restivo for his patience, guidance, support, and advice in helping guide me to this project’s key ideas and keeping me sane.

Thank you to my dearest, most beautiful friends—Erika, Katy, Kelsey, and Jing—for suffering through my fears and ramblings and being there for me throughout.

Most importantly, I must thank my family. To my cousins, thank you for giving me friendship and escape from the struggles of my education and teaching. To my grandparents, thank you for the love, belief, and hope constantly sent and the confidence it built. To my brother, Derek, thank you for being my greatest defender and dearest friend. And to my parents, Jane and Jim, thank you for always supporting my decisions (the good and terrifying), for believing in my abilities and dreams, and for the untold support in fulfilling my passions. I cannot imagine this project or my life without you standing beside me.

Thank you all.

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ENTER THE BLUE

I first saw *Blue* in late 2010. It was in a course on color and *Blue* was the finale. To say I was excited at the prospect of seeing *Blue* would be wildly inaccurate. Sitting down to a seventy-five minute film entirely in blue and filled with the ramblings of a “relic” from the 70s gay political cinema sounded profoundly boring and decidedly pretentious—the absurdity of a twenty-year-old Ingmar Bergman fanatic having apprehensions towards pretense did not occur to me. I dragged myself to the screening, ready for the worst, and sat down in my normal seat directly to the side of the digital projector. With the lights off, the projector hummed to life, and the light projected a black image upon the screen. Quiet ringing of bells echoed out of the speakers, reverberating through the small screening room, and the film’s title appeared brightly against the black backdrop. The letters from the names impatiently shivered until the blue annihilated the black and overtook the screen. As the bells quieted and the organ softly appeared, Nigel Terry began the invocation of blue, telling me “open your eyes...cry out saying, ‘O Blue come forth, O Blue arise, O Blue ascend, O Blue come in.’” The black image burnt away by a harsh appearance of blue light, and *Blue* pushed forward through coffee shops, doctors offices, and homes into remembrances, recitations, and proclamations, the blue never ceased flowing out the projector and onto the screen. The blue continued on for seventy minutes, never yielding. Jarman’s experience and expression and Simon Fischer Turner’s score populated the blue image with alternating solemnity, profanity, and absurdity of emotions and physicality associated and birthed from Jarman’s impending death from AIDS.

With the sudden appearance of the full blue image, I had to shield my eyes from the burning blue light. Behind my closed eyes I saw the first revelation in *Blue*—it had marked my eyes. I attempted to escape the blue behind shut eyelids, but it continued on, denying me freedom, piercing my body, and taking over my vision. For a few seconds, I did not need the screen to experience the color, I only needed the narration, score, and the blue scorched on the surface of my eyes. The blue overwhelmed my body, like a virus desperately attempting to reproduce through consuming the body it infects. My reticence faded with that painful discovery, and opening my eyes to a beautiful and vibrating aquamarine image only transfixed me further.

And yet, no matter the striking quality of its shade or its ability to infect the body with desire, the unending blue and the narration surrounding it became dull after a while. There is only so much the blue can show before it begins to feel redundant. *Blue* was beautiful, but not *that* beautiful. The narration changes, but without a shifting image, the experience eventually became tedious. My eyes instinctively wandered, looking away to find something else to fill my mind, if only for a moment to pass the time. And it was then, in this boredom, I stumbled upon what the blue image caused in the space: the room had become fully blue. Everything from the chairs to the walls, ceiling, whiteboard, projector, my peers, and myself were covered in blue. *Blue* extended past the screen into the space of its projection, and transformed everything it touched into itself. The blue not only seared my eyes, but the room. The totality of blue made it possible for me to reach out and touch the blue covering my arm. I could feel the blue; I could feel my body heat becoming a part of the blue. The blue had become tangible, transitioning

from screen, to room, to body—enveloping me into its fold. There was no escaping the blue except to leave the room and *Blue* behind, abandoning the experience.

This radical aesthetic aggressively grappled with how to produce an image of something unimaginably painful. While today, “living with AIDS” has become commonplace, in 1993 that was a fantasy; the truth was a slow death where even lying down was near impossible from the lesions and swellings mutilating the body. What image effectively presents such a grueling and devastating reality? Jarman’s concern with this question led to *Blue*’s overwhelming, painful, and annihilating visual and aural expression and subsequent challenge to ancestral forms of image making and consumption. The blue of *Blue* ruptures space, giving rise to “incorporeal Universes...infinitely open, transformative, unpredictable, uncoordinated worlds that transport one out of the everyday.”¹ The depleting of bodies, narrative, and classical structure in favor of ruminations on blue opens a space to reconsider the role of representation, color, and medium in expressing realities and affective experience. *Blue* favors a revolutionary type of history to express queerness with AIDS, a “universal history.” Deleuze and Guattari write, “Universal history is the history of contingencies, and not the history of necessity. Ruptures and limits, and not continuity. ...universal history is not only retrospective, it is also contingent, singular, ironic, and critical.”² An expression of the indefinable demands a history that acknowledges the perpetual flow and change of the past, present, and future, that does not become bogged down in the individual form, but instead circulates freely between “great accidents” and “amazing encounters that could have happened elsewhere, or before, or might never have happened.”³ In a word, *Blue*’s moving and staining blueness shrugs off the rigor mortis of order, structure, and expectation—concepts oppressing and denying for centuries the queer population at the heart

of *Blue*. Most strikingly, for this project, is how *Blue* uses color in a radically mutating state as the plane on which to challenge not only these systems of constriction, but also the boundaries for color and medium, rupturing open a space for a political engagement with color.

While the political and ethical struggles of the queer community and the overlapping AIDS community are not of central focus here, their history and Jarman's relationship to them will help ground and guide this project through its different conceptualizations. At its core, *Step Into a Blue Funk: Transversal Color in Derek Jarman's Blue* is a reconsideration of *Blue*, blue, and the blue—or the film, the color, and the presence they express. With *Blue*, a space is made available to take seriously the affective potentials of color on the body and collective desire, and the potential of a politics of color.

In chapter one, "Stuck in the Graven Image," I will work through the critical history of *Blue*, beginning with the popular press readings of the film as a representation of *being* queer with AIDS, and therefore, giving access to living the experience of the Other. These readings are an extension of the larger narrative of Jarman as an artist of queer representation. The abstraction of *Blue* only pushes that representation into a more visceral and experiential space, and even closer to Jarman's own experience. Next, I will turn to the central thread of academic readings on *Blue*, which can be seen as reactions to the popular press fantasy of being with the Other. Despite moving beyond the simplistic readings of the blue image as Jarman's blued sight, academic writings still rely on representation, using *Blue* as a representation of 90s AIDS politics. Moving to a more abstracted representation of political process, these readings depend on an outside to analyze *Blue*, ignoring its own central aesthetic and source of affect. By not

contending with color per se, these representational readings narrow the film to being of a certain space and time, hindering the potential radicalism of its form.

Chapter two, “O Blue Come Forth,” examines the synesthetic qualities color can possess. Beginning with the long and phobic history of color, I recount the lineage of theorists and practitioners of color condemning color as dangerous and excessive, making it secondary to the line and narrative. By rejecting that lineage, *Blue* embraces the affective potentiality of color, using the molecular similarities between vision, sound, touch, and emotions to produce a space whereby color is no longer a single sensation, but a synesthetic presence upon and in the body—a becoming-blue for all that comes in contact with the blue.

In chapter three, “Becoming Tangible,” I compare the experience of watching *Blue* with its unique production history to argue that color is a transversal and collective desiring machine. In both, there is a free movement between categories that traditionally limit—sensations and mediums. In *Blue*, color becomes vision, touch, hearing, and affect. In exhibition, *Blue* begins as film moves to performance piece, back to film, into television, postcard, radio, and eventually, the museum. Color brings bodies and affects together to rupture the constricting structures of the line, sensations, and medium. These ruptures and transmutations open a unique orientation in color, a new and politically valuable way of seeing the world.⁴

“A Blue Funk” concludes this project by looking at the political potentials of collective color. Using political histories of the Brazilian worker’s party, Partido dos Trabalhadores, color-coded terror alert systems, and intimate stories of color’s affective devastations, I will show how color can impress upon bodies, dictating emotional and physiological responses. Alternatively,

Blue acknowledges how the transversality of sensation produced by color can be a tool for radical liberation and dismantling of constricting systems of power.

The goal of this project is not necessarily to present a practical and deployable politics of color, but to use *Blue* as a case study in what color can do. Where these revelations lead is open, but escaping from the confines of the long and beleaguered history of color theory, it is finally possible to take seriously the affective and culture weight of color.

1. STUCK IN THE GRAVEN IMAGE

Derek Jarman's *Blue* began as a biography project on Yves Klein. Jarman had a certain devotion to Klein; they shared similar sensibilities on the political potential of art, of its ability to change the body and mind through radical abstraction. Klein's work actively removed form and difference, creating continuous spaces of color that mocked the attempt for narrative or context. The color becomes the object of study, and "meaning" comes as an extension of color's relationship to space.⁵ Many of Klein's works physically extended from the wall into the spectator space asking the viewer to engage with the IKB (International Klein Blue), and color more generally, as a three-dimensional and fully individuated presence. Klein wrote that upon entering the space, "one is literally impregnated by the pictorial sensibility, refined and stabilized beforehand by the painter in the given space."⁶ The artwork breaks from its frame and resonates outward into the space and viewer; Klein challenged the limitations of the medium, using propulsive and singular color to renegotiate the spectator-object relation.

Building on this lineage, Derek Jarman began *Blue* as a multimedia performance piece on Klein titled alternately "Bliss," "Blueprint," *Symphone Monotone*, and finally, *Monotone*. These projects aimed to challenging the limits of the image and representation by extending Klein's theory of art and color to a medium limit point. The performance piece contained many of the elements that would make it into the film, but pulled apart and made unique forms of expression. A 35mm recording from The Tate Museum of an IKB painting was projected with slides overlaid from time to time. Left of the screen sat Jarman and Tilda Swinton reading extracts from writers and thinkers on blue while tracing their fingers across wine glass,

producing a continuous ringing. A group of musicians amassed to the side of Jarman and Swinton, playing Simon Turner's score. Intermittently, a young boy skipped down the aisles handing out blue and gold painted stones to the audience. The piece challenged the constrictions of mediums, merging different forms in a distinctly Jarman-esque manner of bizarre distaste. Jarman attempted to transfer onto media itself Klein's distrust of the line and its engrained need to define and categorize, to representation, to give outline and form. Jarman's humorous merging and slight mocking of film, the act of art, and the museum institution similarly undercuts attempts at context and value, instead preferring to revel in the zeal of possibilities.

Jarman, possibly motivated by his failing vision and body, changed *Monotone* into a far more striking and acute piece. Jarman refocused attention on Klein's ideas, shedding much of the absurdist institutional politics and making paramount the question of representation and the cultural reliance on the image. Much of the art world had, by the 1990s, confronted and come to terms, at least uneasily, with the representational image; however, film as a mainstream medium had yet to actively consider the idea. Therefore, it makes sense for Jarman to turn his focus from performance art to film, the last enclave of representational commitment. The use of film also offers the greatest opportunity to argue for a color politics and ethics of representation, for its ability to seamlessly merge sound, image, spectator, and viewing space. Jarman completes the move from *Monotone* to *Blue* when he decided to use only the pristine, ultramarine blue without additional projections or slides. Following again in Klein's path, Jarman focuses on the striking simplicity of an all-encompassing color to lead his challenge to representation and medium boundaries.

What is bizarre then is how reliant many critics, both popular press and academic, were on representation as the mode of comprehending and positioning *Blue*. The readings ranged from representation of Jarman's and/or a generalized queerness's experience with AIDS to a representation of a political reality and process and ethics of a 90s queer activism. Despite these readings having a logic to them, if not emotional value, why was Jarman's political and aesthetic challenge, that is made apparent in *Blue's* narration, so widely ignored? The obvious answer to this is the historical precedent that Jarman set for himself through his work. This chapter will delve into each of these competing representations to parse their function, logic, and eventual failings, considering ultimately what they have missed through their dependence on representation—or as Jarman terms it, the “Graven Image.”

Derek Jarman's filmmaking existed on the threshold between underground and public. Jarman's aesthetic, content, and politics positioned him along side Kenneth Anger, Robert Downey, Paul Morrissey, Andy Warhol, and other counterculture or experimental filmmakers. Yet, the films were exhibited outside of festivals and niche screenings in theaters across Britain and the world, and he was frequently funded and screened by BBC television and Channel 4. *Sebastiane*, *The Garden*, *Caravaggio*, *Edward II*, and *Blue* are all queer confrontations with British history, politics, culture, and rhetoric that do not conform to the cultural norms of television-funded films—deploying isolating and stark architecture and flamboyant eruptions of color and engaged with anachronistic material worlds—explicitly attacking a heteronormative geography. His oeuvre did not contain easy and “realist” images of queer experience; instead, Jarman cultivated a politics of disjuncture where queer subjects violently struggle for recognition—erupting into spaces of commodified histories and erasure. Yet, they were widely seen,

reviewed by major and minor publications outside of festivals, and were screened on public television and radio. His content may have been rebellious and antagonistic, but he was also mainstream and among the first to tell stories through *sexual* queer bodies. Reaching into the public consciousness and spawning dialogues and outrage helped birth an active, visible, and prominent Queer Cinema. When he was not being attacked for producing pornographic images, using appalling homosexual bodies, or amateur anachronism, his films were used as points of political upheaval for the maligned queer body and culture. (The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group in nun-drag, eventually sainted him.⁷) The potential for public engagement with Jarman's work coupled with his relationship to gay liberation politics, and aggressive use of the male body turned his films into battlegrounds of social values and queer representation.

Until 1986, Derek Jarman overtly, in film and interviews, engaged in filmmaking as a tool of gay liberation politics.⁸ Showing bodies in homosexual acts was necessary as a form of representation, challenging the negative images that surrounded his community through images of a "regular guy in a regular cinema."⁹ When Januzczak Waldemar of *The Sunday Times* dismisses Jarman's queer focus, writing "He allowed his homosexuality to define him much too completely [. . .] 'Okay, you're gay. Now move on,'" he ignores the political reality of being queer, the struggles and limitations put upon Jarman for the mere fact of being. For Jarman, the fact of queerness necessitated a tunneled focus. In *Dancing Ledge*, Jarman states it plainly:

Sexuality colours my politics; I distrust all figures of authority, including the artist. Homosexuals have such a struggle to define themselves against the order of things, an equivocal process involving the desire to be both 'inside' and 'outside' — a source of that dis-ease in the work of Caravaggio, and Pasolini. I

distrust those with blueprints for our salvation. As a group, we have suffered more than most at hands of the ideological “sound.”¹⁰

The films in the first half of Jarman’s career are closely concerned with this type of representational politics precisely because it was seen as an obligation as a queer person with access to public dialogues. However, Jarman complicates simple representation of queer bodies and histories by using avant-garde aesthetics to challenge different fields of regulating power. These early works not only make queerness present, but also a radical means of acknowledging and restoring history.

Jarman’s first film, *Sebastiane* (1976), repositions the history and dominance of Christianity by embracing its mysticism and amplifies the homoerotic structures of the idealization of Saint Sebastian to the point of explicit homosexuality—seen in slow motion objectification of the male body, dwelling on the male genitalia, soft-core beach scenes, and vulgate Latin. *Sebastiane* makes plain the inlayed homosexual desire of Saint Sebastian’s martyrdom—his pale innocence, high cheekbones, feminine hand placement, and delicate features. The queer but repressed figure of (the film’s) Sebastiane prays through primitive sun devotionals not solemn prayers with the Almighty—“Hail God of the golden sun . . . Your body, your naked body . . . That beauty that made all colours different . . . Your beauty holds my heart captive.” *Sebastiane* turns Christianity into a pagan, homoerotic ritual, a form of “homosexual spirituality,” prayer as sex act.¹¹ This spirituality of queer power, along with the moments of queer sexual domination, produces a sexual, present, and acknowledged queer image, one condemned as bad soft-core porn, but also a rare instance to display the normalcy of queer sexual desire. *Sebastiane* avoids the failings of other “Gay is good” films by making the

sexual queer body present instead of the manipulative, tragic, asexual body of, for example, Tom Hanks in *Philadelphia*.

Much like *Sebastiane*, *Jubilee* (1977) attempts a transformative and disruptive politics through the queer body. However, Jarman shifts the aesthetic focus onto a far more aggressive anachronism, bringing the politics of *Sebastiane* to a contemporary setting. Though not as politically apparent and harsh as his later films, *Edward II* or *The Last of England*, *Jubilee* embraces a deliriously grotesque humor of violence and sexuality set against an apocalyptic and fantastical Britain. An oddly prophetic film, *Jubilee* mixes documentary footage of central London districts still recovering from the economic and physical damage of the London Blitz with a queer punk vision of the future. A step beyond gender bending, characters actively deny the idea of categories, becoming sexually aggressive, androgynous performers in flamboyant costumes and musicality. Faces are fractured by make-up and sets are either crumbling or overwhelmed with text and design. The images of the film make seeing the narrative a challenge simply by their aesthetic screams of excess. Jarman said of the film, "*Jubilee* is a cabaret, it's Dada, it's a docustated fanzine . . . it's a protest."¹² Jarman's protest is against nostalgia and the political malaise it produces. Simply looking back fondly traps the subject in desiring a past that no longer exists, if it ever did. *Jubilee* is Jarman's first real anachronistic past through violent queerness. While *Sebastiane* contented with queer subjects in the past, it was also acknowledging what is readily apparent but actively avoided. In contrast, *Jubilee* uses drag bodies as eruptions of anachronism dismantling the beautifully remembered past. As Jim Ellis argues, "The past does not explain or justify the present, but offers instead a potential site of resistance."¹³ By queering the past, Jarman is able to challenge conservative nostalgia for a

traditional past. The gay liberation politics of *Sebastiane* are extended to *Jubilee* as queerness shifts from being pointedly shown as normal and sexually present to a tool of active rebellion dismantling the weapons of heteronormative power.

These two early examples of Jarman's politics continue in varying styles through *The Tempest*, *Angelic Conversations*, and *Caravaggio*, but in 1986, Jarman's relationship to a gay liberation politics shift. He was still concerned with the ways queer bodies appeared on screen and the potential political and ethical value of those bodies, and yet his films developed a harsher and more cynical aesthetic and narrative quality. Queerness continued to play a dominating role, but how Jarman engaged with those bodies and the expectations he had of them changed markedly. The rise of Thatcher—the figurehead for neoliberalism's intensified greed and attacks against the socially marginalized—and Section 28 systematically denied and attack the queer community by exploiting the consumer block, ignoring AIDS, and restricting the freedom to exist or speak openly.¹⁴ In *Modern Nature*, Jarman even condemns his own community, "And everywhere *clothes* shop—as if everyone, knowing their time was ending had put on their best suit for the occasion."¹⁵ He was frustrated with gay consumerism, seeing the population as monetarily supporting their own oppression as a means of denying their coming reality, and tacit agreement by gay elites with the government (Jarman came under fire attacking Ian McKellan's acceptance of knighthood). Each perceived failing and injustice can be seen in his films of this period, explicit and implicit, as causing the enraged turn, but Jarman being diagnosed as HIV positive seems most crucial.

For Jarman, those with the disease were fighting more than AIDS. They were struggling to survive while their government purposefully feigned ignorance and the negative queer

population either shunned their positive counterparts or appropriated the disease—“Living with AIDS”—for quick political capital.¹⁶ Jarman’s anger and frustration culminated in the harsh aesthetics and violent politics of *Edward II* (1991). Jarman’s version of Marlowe’s play simultaneously occupies the past and present with the actors performing in a traditional style and using the Elizabethan, but anachronistic objects (laminated letters, porcelain mugs, drag costumes, filtered cigarettes, and Annie Lenox), minimalist pillared sets, and intrusions of modern protests against British homophobia that challenged the “proper” and “regel” tone of those performances. The most striking difference compared to a traditional performance of *Edward II* is the introduction of queer sex as background punctuation. The actors do not acknowledge the sex; it merely exists within the space seemingly as common as the Elizabethan English and royal backstabbing. *Edward II* moves beyond a retelling of a historical figure by combining it with Jarman’s rendering queer bodies sexually visible and thus anachronistic. The experience of disrupted history becomes overt when war scenes are replaced with AIDS and Section 28 protests—the dying queer activists standing in for Edward’s battle for power and his queer identity. The film creates a sense of unease and confusion, disrupting the viewer’s expectations and desires for either traditional or revisionist telling, not an in-between queering. *Edward II* is not interested in allowing the images to speak for themselves—helping to normalize queer experience over time with erotic male nudes—as Jarman’s early films attempted. The aesthetics make antagonistically clear that a queer cinema forcefully reinserts queerness back into history to combat the parallel and continuing struggle for political and social equality. The anachronistic use of objects, bodies, and sexuality represents the queer experience of historical

and cultural erasure—from past, present, and future. The struggle in the present for future queer survival only occurs through revitalizing the historical queer body.

The palpable resentment and rage of *Edward II* softens by 1993 when Jarman releases his final film, *Blue*. It is still apparent that Jarman is frustrated with his community and the neglect of his nation, but those intervening six years from his diagnosis to filming *Blue* forced him into a new bodily experience of the world. As with all of his films, *Blue* never descends completely into solemnity, always keeping a streak of grotesque humor and righteous indignation, but the disease and medications began taking their tolls on Jarman, altering his life and his relationship to his art:

It started with sweats in the night and swollen glands. Then the black cancers spread across their faces—as they fought for breath TB and pneumonia hammered at the lungs, and Toxo at the brain. Reflexes scrambled—sweat poured through hair matted like lianas in the tropical forest. Voices slurred—and then were lost forever.¹⁷

Jarman recites in *Blue* a long list of side effects that his medication, DHPG, caused (its drips “Trills like a canary”¹⁸). A partial version: increased risk of infection, anemia, fever, rash, abnormal liver function, abnormal thoughts or dreams, abnormal kidney function, malaise, swelling of the body, coma, shaking, nausea, vomiting, loses of appetite, bleeding from the stomach or intestine, psychosis, damage to nerves, low white blood cell count, increased number of one type of white blood cell, hair loss, hives.¹⁹ Jarman’s body was falling apart through a rotation of forty-eight side effects and innumerable virus symptoms. Each line and

note of *Blue* has a feeling of death, of the inescapable and *known* end; death weighs on the film, Jarman and the viewer knowing there is only one possibility and it is not survival.

The final and most important side effect for Jarman was retinal detachment (where the damaged retina begins to “peel away leaving innumerable black floaters”²⁰). Observed in patients before and after DHPG therapy, it was possibly a symptom of the disease; a result of the increased likelihood for infection; some other drug side effect; or a sad coincidence of the drug trial. Whatever the reason, Jarman’s vision was disintegrating and forced him to reconsider the relationship between a queer politics and the image:

I was always struck with images. I could have made the film with actors, I suppose, but there’s always the question of whether the audience will identify with them. You’d have to get past that hurdle before you ever got close to the experience.²¹

Bodies hinder the possibilities of art; they lead and dictate the viewer. Jarman’s past work relied on the present body to tell its stories, but as this quote suggests, continuing such work failed to account for the unique and devastating reality of his experience. Bodies could not represent what AIDS was doing.

It is understandable, if not expected, that much of the press confronted *Blue* as a representational film based on the language Jarman used for *Blue*’s press and his historically consistent politics. The film’s aesthetics also appear to mirror the experience of going blind from AIDS—singular image of color that simultaneously exists filling and negating; navigating the world through sound; and fazing between past, present, and future, real and imaginary, and waking and sleeping—and the narration contains Jarman himself speaking in first person from

a script based in part on his own diaries. By removing bodies, the film moved closer to an “authentic” representation of the AIDS experience.²² *Blue* feels extremely intimate, as if Jarman was attempting to give the viewer himself, the outer limit of gay liberation politics— representation through first-person vision. Much like body-based, first-person filmmaking (e.g., *Lady in the Lake*, *Enter the Void*, and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*), *Blue* can be read as seeing through the narrator’s eyes and hearing through the narrator’s ears. *Blue*’s constricting experience liberates it from the limitations of the third-person camera.²³ The abstracted aesthetics only pushes the blue image and shifting sound design into a far more visceral extension of Jarman’s own experience. The film becomes representation through the *lack* of a bodily marker, as opposed to the more conservative gay liberation politics of “good gays” *being* on screen.

This initial reading of *Blue* leads to numerous slippages between the film’s world and the spectating world, creating a troubling political and ethical engagement. First, an inconsistency of where Jarman resides in relation to his film occurs as “filmmaker” and “narrator” and “author” and “subject” become interchangeable. The different terms—one being physical creator and the other being fictional object—conflate into a single subject for critics— “the film maker’s spirit seems on the verge of taking leave of his body and drifting into the ether;” “the narrator expresses fear, rage and contempt;” and “the film maker, who is being treated in a public hospice, rails against.”²⁴ The impulse to combine these terms extends from the desire for this film to be overtly about, by, and through Jarman, to make Jarman the main character (named Blue) of the film and view it more as an experimental documentary than a representational fiction. As John Paul Ricco writes,

Blue is Jarman's *adieu*, it is the way (the path, the placeless place) in which he says and sees *adieu*, precisely where saying and seeing, speech and vision fail him and us—where speech and vision bid their *adieu*. *Blue* is rendered nearly homologous with *adieu*, and sounds a prayer for what is, yet cannot be seen, spoken, filmed: death, the Outside, AIDS.²⁵

Ricco positions Jarman as the originator of the experience of *Blue* and its ultimate subject, literalizing the film's aesthetics with Jarman's experience of AIDS. An awkward path develops from these confluences, despite a rather daring reading of representation as abstraction in blue, these writers ultimately (directly or indirectly) position *Blue* as a means to *experience* queerness with AIDS—an appropriation of the Other. Narrative filmmaking, which *Blue* participates in, generally attempts to draw the viewer into the experience making them connect and empathize with the characters, always using visible bodies outside the viewer and moving/cutting cameras to create a space for the viewer to mentally navigate and comprehend, allowing the viewer in, but without negating the experience of the character. *Blue* does not permit such spatial and facial logic. The film restricts what is visible by overwhelming vision with the blue—negating through its fullness. *Blue's* single blue image matches Jarman's blindness; thus, the film can become a first-person perspective allowing the fantasy of experiencing another's reality.²⁶ No moment unequivocally comes where the narrator's *I* can be divested from the viewer (critic) into a third-person pronoun (*he, she, them*), thus permitting empathy to mutate into *being* the character.

In the case of *Blue*, that character is the queer dying from AIDS, a position of layered aggression and oppression by the state, society, and community, leading to another slippage—

taking what is Jarman's personal experience and making it a universal one. *Blue* becomes a crisis of vision for the *queer* body, not simply Jarman's.²⁷ Combining the desire to experience Jarman's vision and seeing Jarman as a stand-in for queerness with AIDS turns *Blue* into a first-person representation of a totality. This then reinforces Jarman's own anxieties and frustrations with the politics circulating AIDS, washing away the individuality of suffering in favor of a clean and smooth object of pity and easy comprehension and consumption.

By the late 90s, after Jarman had begun to fade from popular memory, academics started publishing essays, books, and collections on Jarman's final film. Academics attempted to distance themselves from the representing/experiencing the Other readings, both to silence the appropriating neo-liberal fantasy and to offer something more nuanced and political. Tim Lawrence argues *Blue* in fact used its blue image and depleted image to "demonstrate that AIDS art is an artificial representation, not an objective truth."²⁸ *Blue*, therefore, continues the work of its inspiration, Yves Klein, who sought to deny representation and spectacle in his art through lacking the components of form and categories. "Lines are for me the concretization of our mortal state, or our sentimentality, of our intellect, and even of our spirituality. They are our psychological limits, our hereditary, our education, our skeleton, our vices, our aspirations, our qualities, our astuteness."²⁹ Bodily representation restricts movement, the freedom that Klein saw possible in color.

The influence is apparent when Jarman "pray[s] to be released" from the "Graven Image," actively refusing representation.³⁰ Jacques Khalip and Robert Mitchell extend this prayer to being "a wish for an afterlife, for a domain of experience that the subject can survive, after the end of all images is accomplished;" the blue image allows escape, freedom from the

bounds of earthly expectations and representations.³¹ To view *Blue* as representational of the bodily experience of AIDS denies the expansive possibilities of art and “the universal blue” at “the limits of sight and thought.”³²

Oppositionally, a desire developed to use *Blue* as a historical object of political struggle. Viewing *Blue* as bodily representation placed the film as a biography of a specific time and as a confrontation with homophobic politics. This is argued through two simultaneous readings. First, *Blue* continues to be a document of the past, distilling the process and mentality of the early 90s queer body with AIDS. *Blue* preserves the reality of AIDS symptoms and medication side effects, the cultural and political oppression and blindness, and reality of friends disappearing and body fading.³³ Second, *Blue* demonstrates the political power of 90s queer activism. One of ACT UP!’s most powerful slogans—“Stop looking at us; start listening to us!”—is aligned with the aesthetics of *Blue*. Jacques Khalip argues that by removing the body of AIDS from the image, Jarman puts the focus on hearing the experience of AIDS. Khalip quoting Eve Sedgwick’s elegy to writer and activist Michael Lynch, “The look of her friends comes with the sound of their looking—in other words, the sound of their gaze. Voice compounds voice in a phonic melee that records in the inner ear like a ‘fractured’ and *therefore* militant body of queer rebellion.”³⁴ Queer activism is grounded in the echoing of the lost, of sound reverberating back on us as an impetus to the struggle. The lack of an image only heightens the devastating force of queer sound, for it intimates the presence of the queer self. Khalip, building on Jean-Luc Nancy’s claim that listening is “the reality of access” to self, argues that the visual is always already present, while sound “arrives” always resonating broken and discontinuous. There is an inconsistency and change that occurs in sound that matches the desire for the “fractured”

voice of the echoing dead. It is this disrupted sound that becomes the “queer rebellion,” for Nancy writes that listening “entails an *attack*” on the body, penetrating and vibrating the simultaneous presentness of its violence and the reality that it has already happened, its pastness.³⁵ This violent echoing aligns with *Blue*’s swell and wave of sound-time and -space, flying from Bosnia to London, from the beginning of time to the death reverence of Blue. The lack of image forces the listener to feel the sound move from time to space and back again; to experience the queer rebellion of voice over body struggling against pitying vision. Ultimately, Khalip returns this argument to a matching of discordance with the political upheaval that queer activists both propagated in irruptive chants and occupations, and the continually shifting dialogue and actions of governmental bodies. Queer activism of the 90s was dependent, unlike contemporary politics of visible queerness, on sound—screams, chants, speeches, language, remembrances, and eulogies. As the ACT UP! slogan makes clear, to be heard is to gain recognition and force.

By matching the political sloganeering and struggle of queer activists to the visual and aural qualities of *Blue*, Khalip shifts the representation of experiencing queerness with AIDS to a representation of the *political reality* of queerness of with AIDS. The body is removed because the body distracts.³⁶ Lesions and visible skeletons create horror and pity, not political action. The aural anger of the “Muff diving/Size queen/With bad attitude/An arse licking/Psychofag” becomes infinitely more palpable and present.³⁷ *Blue* does not, therefore, show what it means to die from AIDS, but how the queer body battled for equality in the 1990s.

Despite attempting to escape the confines of representational politics, this academic narrative eventually returns, though admittedly without the problematic burden of generalizing

queer experience and potentially appropriating them, to issues of representation. As Tim Lawrence writes, “Jarman goes further than in any of his previous work in recognizing the inevitable rupture between marginalized sexualities and the national dominant.”³⁸ The representational burden is therefore no longer on the queer body with AIDS, but on the abstract, collective politics of queer activism. In other words, *Blue* represents a historical political reality and the means through which that reality was fought. The aesthetics of *Blue* give access to the affective, emotional, and physical weight activists suffered under. The inability to escape the blue, the aural indexicality, and the desire to be heard constructs a space of a political representation.

While this reading of representation makes sense and has political value, the necessity of history to give form and body to these different politics of representation limits *Blue*. As Deleuze and Guattari write, “There is no history but of the majority, or of the minorities as defined in relation to the majority.”³⁹ History, and the representation it requires, forces a politics of relationality, queerness opposed to heteronormativity, and “normalcy.” With Jarman’s early works, this appears, in part, to be the purpose. For no matter the forceful condemnation of heteronormativity, Jarman’s work is still about heteronormativity and never fully the queer. With *Blue*, the focus becomes the aesthetic and emotional experience outside the confines of the image and history. It dispenses with the absurdities of history, representation, form, and heterosexuality. It becomes an expression of queerness as such—of blueness.

It is this need to reach outside *Blue* for contextualization and meaning that is the crucial concern against these representational readings. They deny the blueness in favor of its relations. The blue image and indexical/biographical sound require representational meaning to be drawn

from the space around the film's production and its cultural capital. Representation requires *Blue* to always be in relation to actions and things outside its own exhibition. Instead, it is necessary to cease gesturing outside and engage *Blue* on its own terms using the watching, hearing, and experiencing to fully confront *Blue's* aesthetics.

As described in this project's introduction, *Blue's* aesthetic, affective, and tactile experience can be revelatory and intellectually demanding without stepping beyond its own context. Representation cannot effectively account for the ways the blue consumes the space or how the viewer and screen mingle into circulations of affects and experience. Nor can it fully contend with the defining trait of the film—the blue. Color in representational readings appears more distracting and negating than a unique form for study. The political potential of color does not easily translate into the physical, political ramifications of queer activism. While vibrant, flamboyant color remains a marker of queer spaces, what the specific color blue accomplishes is more opaque. Instead, the color's overwhelming quality is more easily placed as a superficial match to Jarman's blindness and queer dismissal of the image for voice. To leave the viewing space is to leave behind a serious interrogation of what these aesthetics choices *do* to the space and the viewing body. While these representational readings offer valid and exciting avenues, for much of *Blue's* critical history that is all that was contended with, leaving the phenomenological and affective experience of the spectator untouched. Once we reach the limits of representation, it becomes necessary to return to the film itself, to think of it once more as an experiment in color.

2. O BLUE COME FORTH

Color asks to be thought about, not as an object to be observed or as a text to be read, but as a transaction to be experienced.

– Bruce R. Smith⁴⁰

Blue stretches, yawns, and is awake.⁴¹ Blue is warmth, haze, delphinium, quiet, slow, universal love, terrestrial paradise, heart, dream, buzzing, and virus.⁴² Blue is indigo, cobalt, cyan, sky, ocean, azure, iris, teal, IKB, periwinkle, aquamarine, sapphire, royal, Bieu de France, Prussian, American, powder, turquoise, oxford, Navy. Blue opposes and complements orange. It is linguistically absent in Welsh, the equivalent of green in Vietnamese and Korean, and plural in Russian;⁴³ “cool, tranquil, retiring, and passive” and “suggestive of truth (‘true blue’), calm, serenity, hope, science, also cold steel, melancholy (we have the expression ‘blue as indigo’).”⁴⁴ A surface and flatness, but compelled “to seek depths, to collapse inward.”⁴⁵

Blue, like any color, pushes the limits of definability, never static in its relation to and between spectators. What color one viewer sees is never what another sees. At a genetic level, we can see colors rather differently. Those with color blindness are missing a cone cell changing the dimensionality of color, and tetrachromacy gives some women an additional cone cell making available millions of colors invisible to the rest of the world. Consider the world with millions of new shades and hues, how nuanced and vibrant the natural world could appear, and then imagine being something as miniscule as a mantis shrimp with its sixteen cones, peering into spectrums beyond human comprehension. There is no way of articulating the specifics or realities of our color experience. As David Batchelor humorously writes, “All

attempts to explain something verbally will end up, at some point, with an index finger."⁴⁶ The layering of linguistic, material and personal histories, emotions, memories, dreams, and thoughts makes experiencing color among the highest order of individualization, of the subjective.

Color's profoundly subjective nature and the ability for that nature to freely change, never having a semblance of stability, has historically produced a continuous fear and anxiety around color. It is rather unsurprising then that the press and many academic theories on *Blue* so systematically sidestepped color. They certainly acknowledged its power to dominate and overwhelm, but the concern was always the singularity of the color and how it stood as a visual metaphor to something outside. Yet, the ignorance, if not contempt, towards color has been a historical fact since at least Aristotle and his condemnation of color as excess and blurring, arguing: "A random distribution of color would never yield as much pleasure as a definite image without color."⁴⁷ David Batchelor writes in *Chromophobia*:

Colour is made out to be property of some 'foreign' body—usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive, the infantile, the vulgar, the queer or the pathological [. . .] colour is relegated to the realm of the superficial, the supplemental, the inessential or the cosmetic. In one, colour is regarded as alien and therefore dangerous; in the other, it is perceived merely as a secondary quality of experience, and thus unworthy of serious consideration.⁴⁸

Purging color from the social, or at least the systematic restriction of it, has been a grounded and persistent task. Aristotle called color a drug—*pharmakon*.⁴⁹ Le Corbusier describes color as a dreamy, eroticized intoxication—"The colour . . . exists for the caress and intoxication of the

eye [. . .] The exterior is as red as iron reaching melting point. There it is swollen, supple."⁵⁰ The tripping Aldous Huxley wrote that the colors became so intense "they seemed to be on the point of leaving the shelves to thrust themselves more insistently" at him. Roland Barthes called color "like a pinprick in the corner of the eye" with the power to "lacerate."⁵¹

Natalie Kalmus, wife of Technicolor inventor Herbert T. Kalmus, created a system of defining and structuring the use of color in film. Kalmus presented color as the last step towards realism in film, duplicating "faithfully all the auditory and visual sensations" of the world.⁵² Kalmus wanted to remove the "flagrant mistakes" in color film (i.e., flamboyant and vibrant color) by coding colors to "schemes of natural objects."⁵³ However, for this to be possible, Kalmus had to remove doubts as to what colors meant and their purposes. Kalmus wished for colors to be readable, universally understandable; she wanted to produce a linguistics for color, and used emotional values to do so:

Orange is bright and enlivening; it suggests energy, action.

Yellow and gold symbolize wisdom, light, fruition, harvest, reward, riches, gaiety; but yellow also symbolizes deceit, jealousy, inconstancy in its dark shades, and particularly when it is tinged with green.

Green immediately recalls the garb of Nature, the outdoors, freedom. It also suggests freshness, growth, vigor.

Dark green, blue, violet, and indigo are cooling, quiet colors. They are tranquil and passive. They do not suggest activity, as do the reds and orange. Blue is suggestive of truth ("true blue"), calm, serenity, hope, science, also cold steel, melancholy (we have the expression "blue as indigo").⁵⁴

Kalmus was able to put these definitions to work by making the use of Technicolor film stock contingent on hiring a Technicolor color supervisor (usually Kalmus) who could shut down production if the film stepped too far outside these definitions.⁵⁵ This is an investment in the removal of the experiential connections to color on the part of spectators, and dulling color into simplistic images lacking the narcotic and explosive dangers they can excite.

Kalmus' systematizing of color is best understood as the final attempt to stop the encroachment of color beyond the line. Aristotle's claim that drawing without color is more arresting than a mass of color fundamentally positions form and representation as the path to meaning and value. For Aristotle, the line brings the figure into being through the demarcation of objects and bodies in space, and makes narrative possible by producing clear and comprehensible difference, categories, and by extension, ideology.⁵⁶ Examining the opposing artistic examples of Jean-Baptiste Greuze and Henri Matisse, Brian Price lays out the ideology of the line and color—narrative and the formless. Greuze's melodramatic gestures, vivid facial expressions, and heavy shadows detail moralistic paintings where the conflict exists not between the clear and constricting lines and dull creams, browns, and gray-greenish, but between characters as they struggle against their moral failings. In *The Drunken Cobbler* (late 1770s), Greuze depicts a mother protectively separating her children from her drunken husband. The restrained color only fills in the lines, allowing the narrative of the dangers of drinking to be made plain. A hundred years later, Matisse provides a joyous death march to the line in *The Joy of Life* (1905–6). The exulting figures dance and entwine their bodies as thick strokes of color bleed over lines collapsing the separation between body, earth, and ground. The orange marking two bodies streaks, transforming their embrace into fusion. Where the pink

sky, yellow earth, and vibrant bodies begin and end is made unclear with a sensual conflation.⁵⁷ As Price argues, “Matisse achieves a space more haptic than optic [. . .] an erotic surface [. . .] free of the moral dimension of narrative,” a reveling in the explosive vitality of color.⁵⁸ What Price’s reading of Greuze and Matisse, along with long line of color deniers, makes clear is that the dismissal of color as superficial, superfluous, and sinister is to rein in color’s flowing subjective nature, erotic wonder, and unruly politics.

Blue, in part, functions as a vitalizing of color, to use color as the focal point to challenge form, and makes color the point of theory and politics. As visual artist Jeremy Blake wrote, “Before abstraction was a visual style, an abstraction was a philosophical concept that called up multiple images. That’s what abstraction means to me: the visual demonstration of philosophical nuance.”⁵⁹ *Blue*’s color abstraction gives opportunity to shed the burden of representation, and embrace Klein and Jarman’s attraction and devotion to the freeing potential of color.

Jarman states “BLUE IS BLUE.”⁶⁰ Blue is itself, but to pose the unanswerable question, why blue? What in blue’s history, texture, and experience possibly drew Jarman towards it? What does blue nuance? Or rather, what is blue? Is it just an image? (Can color even be an image?) Can blue hear, speak, think, and act? Where does blue take us? What does blue do to us? What does blue want from us? In the experience of *Blue*, color pushes beyond the visual into sensations of touch and sound demonstrating the possibilities of color, and becoming a *force* affecting change upon the bodies of its spectators—peeling off color’s visual form to reveal its circulating presence of intensities.

So, what is blue? Or Blue? Or *Blue*? How does one describe the color? And which blue to describe? Is it as simple as looking at the sky and saying, “That is blue”? A quick search on Wikipedia reveals a incomplete list of things named “Blue”: seven movies; two bands; sixteen albums; twenty-seven songs; one NFL mascot; and one Carter. Nations create their own unique shade—Prussian, Parisian, Hungarian, and Egyptian—and their own cat breeds—Russian and British Blue. And unlike any other color, a genre of music defines itself through blue. Guy Deustcher tells the story of William Gladstone, British Prime Minister during the late 1800s, counting each time a color appeared in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and discovering very odd numbers: black, 170; white, 100; red, thirteen; yellow, under ten; green, under ten; blue, zero. At no point did Gladstone find an equivalent to the term blue in Homer’s poems.⁶¹ Gladstone surmised this meant the Greeks were colorblind and eventually evolved the ability to see blue.⁶² Using the scientific method instead of faulty assumptions, it was discovered as languages develop, across continents and cultures, words for colors develop and appear in a fairly consistent order: black, white, red, yellow, green, and then blue. Languages do vary, but almost universally, black is first and blue is last.⁶³

The reason, it seems, comes from the natural world—blue is far too rare to warrant a word so quickly. Blue may cover the sky and fill the oceans, but it is the least common color in the natural world. It has the largest volume and fewest varieties. Blue pigment, necessary for organic life to have color, is among the most complex systems to produce genetically. The body of animals and plants have not consistently evolved the trait of blue pigments simply because it uses too much energy to continually produce.⁶⁴ The lack of blue in the natural world also makes blue organisms more visible—a potential evolutionary disadvantage.⁶⁵ Much of the blue seen in

the world—the sky, ocean, eyes, many minerals—are not actually blue, instead they have absorbed lower wavelength colors (reds and yellows) and reflect the blue back—blueness as rejection. What these disparate pieces of science imply then, is that Homer’s lack of a word for blue is because, in part, vision dictates language; to not see blue makes the need for the word “blue” a low priority.

Jules Davidoff was curious then, what effect can lacking a word have on the ways a person experiences color? He decided to find a community whose language lacked a word for blue and give them a test. The test would give a participant six cards—five green and one blue. The participant would look at the cards and point to the card that was different from the others. Upon visiting the Himba people in Namibia, whose language does not contain a word for blue, the test showed that those who participated did not state a difference. They have the genetic ability to see blue, and in fact, do see blue, but they still passed over the difference. Davidoff argues this happens because to have a word makes the thing stand out, makes it apparent.⁶⁶ Language does not make color exist, but it gives a means of articulating it, of understanding, of finally seeing. Stan Brakhage provocatively asked, “How many colors are there in a field of grass to the crawling baby unaware of the word ‘Green?’”⁶⁷ Fewer, it seems.

Despite the obstacles the natural world and our bodies place between us and blue, they have also taught us the power of blue. Blue exhausts, draining energy for its production. Blue reflects, projecting itself on to us. Blue is a presence calling out. A locus of energy, flows, ideas, ideology, and culture, blue draws these disparate functions together becoming a force, pushing outwards and pulling inwards. We as a people are willing to go to great lengths to see, touch, understand, and own blueness. We continue to name, use, feel, and *be* blue. We appear to desire

blue, its timidity, its willingness to hide from us until we call its name (O Blue come forth), and it draws us sensuously in. Blue spreads out beyond a singular visual towards an infinite multiplicity making it near impossible to contain or define its meaning and purpose.

Blue appears, by its very existence, to challenge the natural and human realms. It becomes an anachronism in the world, its very presence calling attention to itself, pulling energy and focusing towards itself. Blue is rare, reticent, secretive, angry, glaring, flamboyant, inhuman, beautiful, death, life, exploited, and yet, rejected. Blue is contradiction. Jarman's use of blue makes political sense. Blue feels queer. Its presence is a statement against the organizing structures of the world, dismantling the hierarchy of power and ideology. "Blue deterritorializes itself, perpetually rendering blue not blue, rendering image phonic, drawing from the phonic substance or materiality an inherent blueness."⁶⁸

To sit before *Blue* is to experience its shifting, radicalizing force. As the *Blue* projects onto the screen, its blueness radiates outwards filling the room and covering all that exist within the space. Blue circulates around the spectator, covering their bodies, staining their eyes, and warming their bodies with its touch. The language of blue positions it as a changing and flowing force within language and the world, similar to that of affect.

Affects, drawing from Sara Ahmed, Jane Bennett, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and others, come from within and circulate around and through bodies affecting change on their surfaces and in their material formations. Affects are not stagnant; they are flows in constant movement and play. Sara Ahmed writes that affects "involve a process of movement or association" taking, "us across different levels of signification, not all of which can be admitted in the present."⁶⁹ Affect comes into contact with bodies forcing reactions between those bodies

and their surroundings. This collision layers a history of emotional and physiological interactions that come to further define future expectations. Brian Massumi writes of the expectation of terror that is constructed through the color-coded terror system.⁷⁰ The warning system established a generalized terror by marking America in a constant state of yellow (“significant risk of terrorist attack”). The new normal was fear and following 9/11 that fear needed a focal point. The collision of 9/11, yellow coded terrorism, and a societal terror created layers of affect upon the brown body, transforming those bodies into walking affective triggers, a source of automatic fear. This is why Sara Ahmed argues that affects are sticky. The collision of bodies begins to layer affects that are never really washed away, but instead cause more affects to become stuck building an ever more conflicted source of queued affective actions.

The blue matches this affective process, moving out from the screen covering the space and forcing all interactions within those seventy minutes to become consummated in blue. The film’s color makes the bodies of the screening space sticky with the color, transforming the avisual nature of affect into something very much visible, and by extension, touchable.

As Laura Marks argues, “haptic looking tends to rest on the surface of its object rather than plunge into depth,” where the “eyes themselves function like organs of touch.”⁷¹ To see blue covering the surface of our own bodies, to see the pixels and grains of the film dancing across our newly tinted blue skin, is to see the tactility of blue; to see through a blue haptics. The haptic of Blue “does not invite identification with” the affective blue “so much as it encourages a bodily relationship between” the viewer and the blue.⁷² The blue is present. It is a presence asking to touch and be touched.

Akira Lippit writes that *Blue* overwhelms with “a blue with no beyond but blue.”⁷³ Its blue moves outside of its image to a limit point of its own self, defining its own boundaries and limitations through its blueness. Blue is both inside the visual and moves infinitely away. When experiencing *Blue* there are moments where one will want to escape the blue, to turn their eyes away or close them, shutting out the color. To have “no beyond but blue” implies an unrestricted blue, one that is not hindered by the visual quality of color. The unhindered blue, once it has incorporated the visible field, begins transitioning others fields of similar affective circulation.

There is a similarity to how sound and color are experienced. Remember the pulsating blue covering the spectator’s world, turning everything exposed into an extension of the blue. Sound is “sensed as multidimensional, voluminous, ambient, as spatial and temporal” — moving in waves, reverberating off walls and bodies, echoing back upon itself, filling the space, and covering its bodies and forms.⁷⁴ Vivian Sobchack, using phenomenology, argues through the means and effects of such a blue sound. In the essay “Fleshing Out the Image: Phenomenology, Pedagogy, and Derek Jarman’s *Blue*,” Sobchack opens a conversation onto aural blue through phenomenological pedagogy. “Fleshing Out the Image” details the potential in showing students the methodological and pedagogical power of phenomenological inquiry using *Blue*. “Phenomenological method,” Sobchack argues, “insists on an embodied as well as reflective engagement with the cinema, grounding such secondary ‘analyses’ and ‘readings’ in a ‘fleshed out’ and synthetic description, thematization, and interpretation.”⁷⁵ Phenomenology attempts to (momentarily) deplete the film experience of its cultural context, engaging the bodily experience of the film and the body produce through each other. In studying the

exchange of touch, sight, sound, and subjectivity, one can better confront the concerns of the film, culture, theory, etc. The bodily and affective experience of cinema contains the tools of analysis. *Blue* offers a unique perspective for students because it dispenses with traditional forms of filmmaking (i.e. narrative, physical bodies, sets, and cinematographic techniques), instead presenting a simplified visual and aural experience of abstracted sound and color. Sobchack's essay moves through the students' shifting analysis of the film. Beginning with a reliance on the generic codes of film studies (defining the film as avant-garde, documentarian, or auteurist), they fail to engage with the non-normative functions of the film.⁷⁶ Through shifting and rearticulating questions, Sobchack's students begin to dig into what they actually saw and heard, how their vision and hearing were dependent and susceptible to each other. As Sobchack's students attest, the visual singularity of *Blue*'s image has the affective potential to change through the mutability of sound.⁷⁷ Sobchack writes: despite yellow never appearing on the actual film:

we sense yellow when Jarman aurally figures it—against blue—as the
 'yellowbelly, slit-eye,' color of disease and speaks of wilted sunflowers,
 'jaundiced corn,' a 'lemon goblin,' a 'jaundiced kiss,' 'mustard gas,' 'nicotined-
 stained fangs,' 'yellow bile,' and 'piss.'⁷⁸

In other words, sound empowers the body through sensation to disrupt and change that which it perceives.

The narration of *Blue* is also an expansion and even a clearer multiplicity. The tonality of the narrative voices ranges from harsh and smooth, low and high, masculine and feminine, and syncopated and fluid. Nigel Terry, Derek Jarman, Tilda Swinton, and John Quentin each

vocalize a unique vibration that shifts the way the sound hits the listener's ears and the effects they have upon other sensory apparatuses.

What Sobchack's essay and her students' reactions circle around is that the sound in *Blue* is also affective. The sound moves and changes easily and freely (becoming woman, becoming queer) and transports across space and time from coffee shop in London to a bombing in Bosnia to the death of Blue to his awakening. It flows between states as its radiating waves pulse out of speakers filling the negative space. The blue and the sound of *Blue* take on the same affective tact, and as Sobchack's students noted, the sound and image play off each other defining and intermingling each other. Even the word blue has an affective shade. William Gass writes of blue:

The word itself has another colour. It's not a word with any resonance, although the *e* was once pronounced. There is only a bump now between *b* and *l*, the relief at the end, the whew. It hasn't the sly turn which crimson takes halfway through, yellow's deceptive jelly, or the rolled down sound in brown. It hasn't violet's rapid sexual shudder, or like a rough road the irregularity of ultramarine, the low puddle in mauve like a pancake covered with cream, the disapproving purse to pink, the assertive brevity of red, the whine of green.⁷⁹

The sound of blue for Gass is a fluid one, if however subtle and innocuous. Blue is word (sound) of movement, of blowing *ue* and traversing forward with the bumps of *b* and *l*. In itself, the color word as verbalized, propulsive sound is marked as blue. Maybe instead, blue as a collection of sounds has its own register; unique from the others and matching the cool, quiet,

and receding assumptions the cultural has placed upon it. At its aural base, blue has the gestures of sound or, inversely, sound has the gestures of blue.

The movement of the sound is its state of becoming. Becoming is the movement between multiple states of participation forming unique relations of elements and structures, contagions and “mobile hybrids” in states of contacting and spreading.⁸⁰ Sound becomes a force that encircles and consumes the hearer, creating flashes of change on the image that does not. Sound transitions synesthetically from hearing to seeing; making the viewer’s sight an extension of their hearing. The sound “threatens to overwhelm the consciousness”⁸¹ with the chaos of sound and color crossing nerve endings, “fucking with fusion and fashion,”⁸² the one leading into the explosion of the other. Affective sounds spread like a “blue virus:”⁸³ color-sounds and affect form as one, a feeling color—a chromaffect?⁸⁴ Becoming-blue for sound is the melding with the blue color into a hybrid flow of pixelated dust, moving, resting, and sticking to bodies and making them blue and thus opening states for future becomings. Blue sound is that which gives vision where there is none, and opens fluidity between the heard, the seen, and the felt. The tactile viscosity allows the sensation of touching the immateriality of blue affect; in turn, the blue affective color allows the sensation of seeing a radiating, blue sound.

Experiencing *Blue* is to experience *the* blue, not the individualistic blue sound, blue vision, and blue touch. The blue has shed the boundaries of experience, becoming synesthetic waves of ebbing affectivity. The inability to escape visually, aurally, or tactically forces the spectator body into a union with the blue, to become part of the blue. As the blue circulates and spreads over the spectators, consuming them in the blue, “parts and cogs of one another in the

flow that feeds one and the same desiring-machine, so many local fires patiently kindled for a generalized explosion" — the becoming-blue.⁸⁵

3. AN OPEN DOOR

So far, we have seen *Blue* understood as representational, a producer of synesthetic color experience, and a film object of *human* study. With each chapter, the expanding involvement and acknowledgement of color has shown how far *Blue* can push these restrictive categories. While these different theories and perspectives around *Blue* have created valuable and daring conversations about what constitutes representation and the synesthetic potentials of filmic color, they also confine *Blue* to specific categories of understanding, constructing limits for its potential as a theoretical and affective experience and expression. With the second chapter, “O Blue Come Forth,” a consideration of Sobchack and Lippit presented the phenomenological opportunities *Blue* and color offer. These theoretical stretchings demonstrate how to take the viewer past the restrictions of representation through the apresentational zeal of flowing color. The bodily synesthetic experience provides a new way of viewing the world and the bodies and sensations within that world. However, these considerations begin to show their own failings by their reliance on film as a medium of study—thinking *Blue* purely as an experience constructed through human subject engagement with film object.

The relationship between the representational studies in early *Blue* scholarship and phenomenological color studies in the contemporary leads inexorably to the need to turn *Blue* and color into studies of the individual—representation as a study of Jarman and Queer subjects and phenomenological studies of individual synesthetic experience. However, to fully abandon representation as a mode of study means to abandon the individual as the medium of study. In order to contend with the vibrancy of *Blue* and its color, it is necessary to reconstruct

engagement with *Blue* and the color presence that constitutes it. This chapter will, therefore, view the experience of *Blue* as decidedly nonhuman and apersonal, as an affective explosion of change and difference. We will seek to express the ways the color of *Blue* is the synaesthetic, that blue and *Blue* are simultaneously all those experiences and sensations not just mediums through which the human body experiences synesthesia. That is, take seriously that the *Blue* is a thing and presence of its own not dictated and defined by the human, but existing apart as a collection of all that comes into contact with it.

To begin this radicalizing of *Blue* and blue aesthetic experience, we must parse out what is the relationship of color and affect that Akira Lippit presents in *Ex-Cinema: From a Theory of Experimental Film and Video*. Lippit's *chromaffect* is not fully defined beyond "feeling color." It is an evocative term that conjures swirling colors around bodies affecting them in profound ways. However, the possibilities such a term offer are immense and opens wide color's affective qualities. Therefore, I offer two possible directions for *chromaffect* to parse out what *chromaffect* can do or means or says about color and affect:

Chromaffect – affective color. *Chromaffect* is color that radiates in/through the body, slices and massages its way through space, sticks to surfaces, amasses emotions and histories, changes the way the body experiences the world, and affects and is affected by confrontations between bodies in space—a feeling color.

Chromaffect – color affect. *Chromaffect* is affect that colors the world and spreads through a space, becoming visible, tangible, and synesthetic in color; where emotions, feelings, histories, memories, bodies, objects, sounds, smells, and visions collide, merge, and transmogrify. Passing over each other in *chromaffect*, the visual and avisual interchange becoming one, the other, and their original thing. *Chromaffect* is an impossible presence.

If these directions are accepted, it is no surprise when Akira Lippit finds color in *Blue* to be a chromaffect—the combination of the all-encompassing visual and the perpetually circulating avisual. Blue escaped language, pushing to language’s outer limits, and undermining the possibilities of sight. This linguistic power may be what drew William Gass to blue, seeing the limitless linguistic possibilities vibrating within its unnatural presence. Blue stretched language passed its boundaries, challenging words to form new relationships and jumbles. The sounds of *Blue* pushed Vivian Sobchack and her students to hear color, contorting space like the long wavelengths of blue. Kalmus and others recoiled in fear and tried to restrain this crazed and wonderful realm of experiencing color, making it bow to the will of the line—demeaning it to a servant of realism and narrative. A vitality circulates color, a propulsive eruption of emotions and sensations, memories and histories, joys and sadness—“[a] singularity, a rupture of sense, a cut, a fragmentation, the detachment of semiotic content.”⁸⁶ Color is hated, loved, exulted, feared, excess, and real; color is in every present thing, nothing escapes it. Color’s perpetual presence, no matter its smallness, makes it easily imbued with overwhelming sensations—the weeping devastation of eying a deep, burgundy red, a deceased mother’s favorite color; heaving horror at the grotesque pale green of a dead man’s emptied skull; or the perfect, translucent, saffron Gamboge from the killing fields of Cambodia. These sensations are the little details unlocking the swelling deviation of becoming, where one moves to another, transversing from color to affect and back again, becoming changed with each passing.⁸⁷

In color, one finds a powerful transversal...Object? Thing? A transversal presence that consumes, mediates, touches, and comforts. To transverse is to cross boundaries, those

constructed in imaginations of others, those “ancestral forms.” Transversality is opposed to hierarchies of power and regulations, whereby a structure is defined by top down verticality. It equally opposed this verticality’s seeming opposite, where a sense of order is achieved through placing forms wherever they may fit or are needed, a meaningless arrangement in hope of getting through—a horizontal desperation for order.⁸⁸ In both, a desire arises for regulating, that in order comes rigidity, control, and clarity of form. These are concepts of representation and the line, of Kalmus and those early critics.⁸⁹ These are concepts that “delimit and impoverish the consciousness,” they are reified structures for the “subjugated persons who have come to desire oppression,” a part of what Felix Guattari called “Integrated World Capitalism” or Neo-Liberalism.⁹⁰

This, in part, drives gay liberation politics and Jarman’s early career. Despite being focused on a disruptive politics of gay intervention, Jarman and much of gay politics in the 60s and 70s was concerned with being seen and being recognized *by* the power structure of oppression. The intrusions of queer bodies into history were less confrontational and more for historical relevance, of returning the bodies to their proper position within the texts of the controlling powers. The recognition was to rearticulate queerness as a member of that past, not necessarily as full-fledged rebels that wish to destroy a system of power. The grotesque displays of humor and bodies were to call attention to their plight. I would not go so far as to deem Jarman to desire his oppression, but the desire in his aesthetic seems much like punk—an easy and desired appropriation of writhing anger. Both movements are horizontal. They oppose hierarchies, and endeavor to fill the empty spaces left at the bottom, giving voice to the silenced but always in relation to the oppressor. With *Edward II*, Jarman becomes less concerned with

representation than with outright defiance of that disremembered past. Jarman does not revive the queer body of an English king to show the truth of the past. Instead, it is to show a queer's death by anal rape with a burning poker. The past is made acknowledged, but as a rallying cry against its continued bigoted presence. Edward's queer activist troops do not stand asking for inclusion, but open a charge into the repressive line of riot geared troops. *Edward II* is still bound by representational concerns, but opens the path to the transversal presence of *Blue*.

Blue's blue, as discussed in previous chapters, is apart from representation and form, leaning towards the apresentational and affective experience of color and the weight of inevitable and known death. With the ringing bells against a black screen, the color that is expected to appear, that is called to by *Blue's* title, cuts onto the screen with the solemn call "O Blue, come forth." The color begins in its natural state—visual color. A shade of blue color, a version of what the viewer expects. As the narration progresses, moving the viewer deeper into the shuffling movements of AIDS, blue transmutes into Blue, a character dying of AIDS, a possible stand in for Jarman. The character moves between the palpable physical reality of a doctor's office to searing pain and mundane coffee shops. The transcendent impossibilities of intangible blueness flowing through time and space. Blue becomes the color called to, making tangible the hallowed presence. As Blue traverses spacetime, the blue moves outwards and consumes all that lies before it.⁹¹

The blue should be ⁹²thought as deterritorializing the screening space, carrying the blue and the bodies of the space "to a proximity where the distinction between them ceases to be relevant, or where the deterritorialization creates their indiscernibility."⁹³ The further the color moves from its position as just color, the closer the space comes to becoming-blue. In this

stretching outwards and blurring of contours, the blue also becomes tangibly present as the blue begins to cover all before it. Its flowing presence calls attention to its similarities between light waves, sound waves, and heat waves. The sound affects vision and vision affects color, and the blue becomes both, and thus, eruptive in a confusing movement between sensations exciting the body into anxious, exhausting jitters. As these sensations merge and conflict, they make an inescapable reality of blue. The blue is sound, vision, and touch, simultaneously all, becoming synesthetic affect. Synesthesia has moved from the human body being acted upon by color to the color making unrecognizable the difference between the sensations as they perpetually and vibrantly flow through, on, in, and as each other, experientially equivalent, a transversality of color. That is, synesthesia has shifted from a human experience to a quality of *Blue*, blue, and the blue.

The “transversal power” at *Blue*’s core uses the radical experience of color to shift synesthesia into an apersonal, nonhuman force that creates an incorporeal space of queer affect. Jarman opens a blue portal not into representation or easy queer activist politics, but to an expression of the arepresentational queerness with AIDS. Beyond the striking aesthetic differences with his pre-*Blue* work, Jarman’s politics were not of activism, because there is no way to effectively show the AIDS body as they were disappearing too quickly and with such severity. No, *Blue* is a “site of pure potentiality” that defies, dismantles, erupts, and molecularizes.⁹⁴ *Blue* works via transversality: mobile, creative, and self-engendering. To transverse is to move and carry beyond dimensions and laying down lines of flight. Transversality “autoproduces” itself, constantly bringing itself back into existence through itself.⁹⁵ The blue’s synesthetic experience of the visual and avisual world allows it to break from

the restrictions of the line, of heteronormative form, denying “extrinsic coordinates;” thus, the blue is not available to “direct objective representation.”⁹⁶ The inconsistency of the blue makes it beyond the categories of color, sight, character, touch, and sound, and therefore, beyond the restrictions of form, line, and representation. Instead, the blue, the chromaffect, functions as “transitions or passages, able to link up across senses, across events, across ‘temporal contours,’ between or within different aspects of refrains. They are ‘cross-modal.’”⁹⁷

The transversality of *Blue* extends beyond the limitations of the film space. *Blue*’s entire creation from thought to exhibition defies that which lies before and behind it. Just as the color affectively flows between vision, character, touch, and sound, so too flow the mediums of its viewing. As referenced in chapter one, *Blue* began as *Bliss* before rapidly mutating. *Blue* was thought of as early as 1987 as a monochrome film filled with Klein’s words and Jarman’s poems eventually morphing into a film on Klein “punctuated by judo throws” and finally to a more traditional biopic (in the veins of *Caravaggio and Wittgenstein*).⁹⁸ The project continued to evolve over the years until 1991 when Jarman premiered *Symphonie Monotone* before a benefit screening of *The Garden*. This performance was a clear homage to Klein, with challenges to form, medium, and space, but with Jarman’s unique sense of absurdity, serenity, and contempt. Jarman considered adding a naked, blue devil to periodically appear from under the table cursing the audience and a cannon to fire blue confetti.⁹⁹ In *Monotone*, Jarman was thinking to disrupt the art space, to challenge the public desire to *see* the disintegrating deaths caused by AIDS. Their possible existence makes clear the disgust Jarman was feeling towards the art world, in particular the continuous desire of others for Jarman to show what “living with AIDS” looks like:

No ninety minutes could deal with the eight years HIV takes to get its host. Hollywood can only sentimentalise it, it would take place in some well-heeled west-coast beach hut, the reality would drive the audience out of the cinema and no one viewpoint could mirror the 10,000 lives lost in San Francisco to date, so we are left with documentaries and diaries like mine and even they cannot tell you of the constant, all-consuming nagging, of the aches and pains. How many times I've stopped to touch my inflamed face even while writing this page, there's nothing grand about it, no opera here, just the daily grind in a minor key. But in spite of that we would wish our lives to be recorded in an oratorio by a Beethoven or Mozart not in the auction sale of Keith Haring tea towels.¹⁰⁰

As this late diary entry reveals, Jarman desired to present AIDS without the dramatics of filmmaking (the opera), but to capture the emotional swells and crashes of AIDS using something more static, allowing the sound to move the viewer (the oratorio).

When released in its final form in 1993, *Blue* had a three-fold exhibition. Released into movie theatres across England and into film festivals around the world, *Blue* also screened on Channel 4 with a simulcast on BBC Radio 3. Radio listeners were encouraged to write in to request a blue postcard to be mailed, so they too could have a blue image to "watch" as the soundtrack played across the airwaves.¹⁰¹ Eventually the soundtrack was released as a CD with its own fold out blue image, to once more be held and stared at. And finally, after its original run in theatres, *Blue* transitioned back to its original home, the museum, becoming an art projection in the hallowed halls of national galleries.

Blue's exhibition, from its inception, ignores the categories of presentations. The stuffy expectations of a performance piece, radio's nationalist and invisible sound waves, the individual huddling allowed by the CD, and the global entertainment of film, even the now primitive art of physical mail joins the assemblage. The aesthetic experience allows an easy transition between media, and its experimental zeal lends itself to each medium's more extreme ("high-art") realms. In *Blue's* most material form it is a filmstrip with imprinted sound. When projected, it is in fact a series of blue images flashed for fractions of a second. The blue reflects off the screen filling the room with blue beginning the process of birthing chromaffect. Thus, at its seeming core, it is a film.

And yet, the same experience is produced in the home before the television screen. Unlike the moving projection of filmstrip onto screen, the television broadcast is just that, a broadcasting of sound waves that cover the air in radiation. That radiation is grabbed from the sky by antennas sitting atop homes and television sets, translated into electricity, pushed through wires into the back of the set, converted into RGB (red, green, blue) electrons, fired through the vacuumed cathode ray tubes at focusing and deflecting coils, narrowed into lasers that move through masks and phosphor, and finally projected rapidly and repeatedly at the lead lined screen forcing colored light out into the room. The consuming blue still arrives, it still transmogrifies all it touches, but now its pulsation becomes two fold both in the room and in the outside broadcasted world.

Radio achieves a similar act, pulsing sound waves project through the region, are captured by antenna, translated into electricity, retranslated into sound, and pushed out through speakers. The blue sound takes on the task of turning the space an invisible blue as the

listener sits staring at the blue postcard. Or, when experienced as the simulcast in 1993, the radio, television, and their respective waves are a four-fold moving blueness creating a surround-blue for the experiencing body. *Blue's* radical and defying aesthetics may be founded in film, but they are made devastating and magnified in its other mass media.

Blue lends itself to “associative networks” of affective exchange.¹⁰² It freely transitions between states of medium and sensation; continuously moving from one “front” to another, it is a bridge across categories.¹⁰³ To call *Blue* a film suffocates its potentialities. It forestalls the molecular becomings of the blue, caging it within specialized spaces with repressive histories and expectations. To transverse media, *Blue* does not need to acknowledge those histories or succumb to the weight of their normativity. The color became something else other than the individual sensations and bodies it consumed; it became *the blue*—a presence of the visual and avisual. *Blue*, therefore, should not simply be film, television, radio, image, performance, or art; it is all and none, and thus, something else entirely. It too becomes *the blue*, lying outside and inside medium (*exergue* as Lippit argues¹⁰⁴)—a transversal presence bringing the disparate structures, sensations, bodies, and histories together. In other words, *Blue's* associative networks are that of the collective. The blue forces the body (and medium) to remain mobile and changing, constantly redefining itself in relation to the other bodies and to the blue. This combination of interactions between the blue screen, space, bodies, sound, and medium gives rise to a collective blue.

Guattari writes that the “collective” should be understood as “a multiplicity that deploys itself as much beyond the individual, on the side of socius, as before the person, on the side of preverbal intensities, indicating a logic of affects rather than a logic of delimited sets.”¹⁰⁵

A collective does not elide differences, it brings the individual together with other bodies of pre-personal intensities to meld, forming a different—sameness informed by the affects, histories, memories, bodies, emotions, and things of the subjects.¹⁰⁶ The combinations and conflicts of the different affective intensities power the deterritorializing assemblages of the collective. In other words, the politics of the collective is towards a group Eros, whereby the individual gives up its definable form to the presence and force of the group.¹⁰⁷

The value in considering *Blue* as a collective is to upend the historical repressions of color and take seriously what color can do to our orientation with the world. In chapter two, I examined the theoretical and linguistic limitations and fears placed on color. Color was viewed as too much and capable of existing beyond boundaries. Color is in excess of the body and form, and thus, can dismantle foundations and systems of order. Color was made dangerous and subservient to the line to rein in its free-flowing force. In *Blue*, our vision, hearing, and touch sensations become blurred, appearing to merge and crossover into each other bringing our bodies into equivalence with the blue, the chairs, and the rest. The blue presents a new way of being in the world defined by being in excess of the body and sensation, and forming new relations with the space of viewing. By affectively and bodily moving into this space of blue, the spectator embraces that which has been feared of color for centuries. It is precisely what Aristotle and others claimed it could do, except the fear was misplaced. *Blue* shows that color can be the force moving, connecting, and transmuting forms, sensations, and the visual and avisual. *Blue* makes possible a phenomenology of blue, and in that blue, the structures and forms of the world can be dulled, overwhelmed, even annihilated as they too become a part of the blue expression—“Every becoming is a block of coexistence.”¹⁰⁸ The blue collective desire of

bodies, space, things, and synesthetic affects presents an always available, but never fully acknowledged orientation with the world. Making present an encompassing blueness, *Blue* asks a final question in regards to color: what can color do? This is to say, just as all molecular collectives are ultimately a politics, the collective desires of color should be understood as a politics of color.

A BLUE FUNK

In this thesis, I have used *Blue* as a case study to reconsider the history and affective potential of color. In considering the ways in which *Blue* challenges the structures of representational cinema, actively embraces the long feared qualities of color, and in doing so, transverses the constrictions of bodies, sensations, visibility, and media. Color in *Blue* actively flows through and around bodies, objects, and things, challenging that before it to see anew in its blue presence. As I asked at the close of chapter three, the blue forces the things consumed in its collective blue desire to ask: what can color do? In conclusion, I want to attempt to answer this question with outlining some of the contours of a politics of color—only one of a limitless set of potentialities for what color can do.

To begin engaging a politics of color, it is first important to discuss what a collective politics looks like and can do outside the controlled experimentation of the academic screening room. Felix Guattari's keenest example of the collective desire, and its political potential, comes with the Brazilian political party Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). As a worker's party, the PT attempted to delimit economic and social restrictions on workers to allow a revolution to the structure of Brazil. The failure of previous worker's parties in Brazil came from the conflict between urban and rural workers. While both groups desired the same political upheaval to give a more equitable distribution of power and opportunities, there was a radical difference in what was necessary for each group of workers to achieve a political reformation. And yet, without a united political party for all workers in Brazil, the social and economic elite would continue to thrive in their united political fronts. The PT, therefore, attempted a radical political

structure to devalue hierarchies and generalized platforms, and empower small collectives of workers at the local level.¹⁰⁹ As Guattari writes, “Starting from the plurality of partial struggles [...], far-reaching collective struggles can be launched.”¹¹⁰

Their structure was distinctly communist, following the Party lineage with paid, vanguard leadership; a clear focus on the workers, particularly in connecting the larger agricultural population of Brazil with the growing urban population; and front organizations engaging smaller subsections of the population. However, PT broke from the more rigid structure of the Party, particularly in regards to Leninism, by lessening the power of the vanguard—“the bosses.” The subsection front organizations function as miniature parties for each region, choosing their own representatives both in regards to the larger Party and their own regional governments. These regional parties deployed platforms tailored to their needs as opposed to larger Party politics, for the PT does not have an overriding platform, but instead, a guiding principle of supporting the worker in all of its incarnations and needs. Separating these regional powers from the Party gave the PT one of its most unique qualities: nominating actual workers who, in many cases, were illiterate and untrained in politics as regional and national candidates.¹¹¹ By bringing together rural and urban workers, there was no longer a political need for a candidate “attractive” to a general populace.

The political potentials found in the use of small regional collectives is that they are not restricted by the larger Party, but use their knowledge of local needs to empower the workers at that level. These regional platforms are then brought to the Party. This is not for approval, but to engage in a dialogue among the differing regions to see how the small collectives form into the national, and global, collective. In other words, the Party is the loudspeaker for the physical

demands of workers across the country. The Party's national platform is a synthesizing of the thematic concerns of the worker to better disseminate them nationally and to more effectively engage with global workers' movements.

This structure emphasizes the worker not as a singular being, but as expansive and complex. In other words, it is through the collective experience of the individual members that the PT exists and forms an abstract body of individual, regional, and national subjectivities attempting to guide and change the state of the worker in Brazil. The multiple layers of collective desires and their collisions with other groups form together into an affective and physical force of workers within Brazil. This decentralizing of the Party and thus the forming of a non-dictated collective desire, it can be argued, opened the PT to a larger base of support, in part uniting the workers to themselves as a group.¹¹² Thus, allowing Lula, a former worker, to be elected President of Brazil offering unprecedented access for the worker to larger political structures. For this reason, PT not only stands as a point of collective desire, but also the potential revolutionary force that can come from embracing the expansive multiplicity of a formless collective.

However, like all deterritorializing forces, the collective must be in a constant state of revolution in order not to tighten into a regimenting machine as seen with Deleuze and Guattari's ultimate enemy, fascism.¹¹³ Had the local collectives of PT ceased conflicting on the needs of the workers, or had the divergent realities of urban and rural merged, the revolutionary political collective would have stagnated. Equally, had the vanguard forestalled the amorphous interaction of local parties, PT would have amassed a political structure

reminiscent of the failed Parties of the USSR and its Soviet Bloc. Without movement, rigor mortis sets in, suffocating any revolutionary desires.

It is with this exchange between local and global (micro and macro) that I wish to return to color and consider the politics that have historical and restrictively deployed it, but that can also ultimately cause its release. As has been presented throughout this work, color historically functions as addition, being pulled back and cornered. The weakening of color's possibilities through constriction to the line or fear mongering allows the exploitation of its affective potential. Color, when allowed out in even the smallest capacity, rips through emotional barriers with an uncomfortable ease. A mother's favorite color, vermilion, a luscious reddish orange made vivid by Goya, becomes the bane of her daughter years after the mother died, a perpetual remembrance of something lost. Upon watching *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes* (1971), Stan Brakhage's harrowing vision of the body relieved of its "soul," I stumbled from screening room and retched before my car. The silent snapping of bones, the cleaning of a hollowed chest, and the careful slicing along the face to release the skin from its grasp on the muscle and bone all show a human made alien and incomprehensible. The most alien of all was the emptied skull: inside was a green I had never seen before, something foundationally verdigris but with heavy doses of artichoke and mantis and maybe an additional dash of yellow. That greenish membrane covering the skull's base infected my mind, drilling deep into its memory neurons. I dreamt of it and woke sick to my stomach. When I glance that atrocious green, the sickness comes back dying to escape. I have become allergic to that green, training my mind to reflexive avoid and deny the green's existence. Fear of physical ailment

overwhelms the reality that a future green of this shade is not the same disturbing object as seen in Brakhage's film.

Nagisa Oshima declared, upon making his first color film, *The Cruel Story of Youth* (1960), that he was banishing green: "Green always softens the heart," he said.¹¹⁴ Green stands in for the "tear-jerking melodramas and flavorless domestic dramas in which imbecilic men and women monotonously repeat exchanges of infinitely stagnant emotions." It is artificial, built around "decaying" rooms of perfect order and framing, the color of "commonplace gardens" and the "stability" of tea cabinets. "I hated such characters, rooms, and gardens from the depths of my soul."¹¹⁵ The color marks the passivity of domestic structure and compulsory tranquility. The green of pines—an "irregularly shaped green [that...] becomes ambiguously natural." No matter how harsh the human conflict, the green of shrubbery would be made mild the instant it entered.¹¹⁶ Oshima wanted to smear his canvas in black, to show the harshness of reality and disgusting depths of the human soul—a fact green denied and obscured. Banishing green was to "negate reality," to bring about something new in Japanese cinema that was not ambiguously real, to incinerate the sensibilities that the green represented and engendered.¹¹⁷ Oshima's green was disgusting to him, it "involve[d] a 'weightiness' of feelings,...in some sense, material," it was heavy with affect.¹¹⁸ Oshima wished to use the absence of color to produce the same revolutionary ruptures seen in *Blue*, but challenging the relationships of collective green through its annihilation.

Color has no inherent meaning, focus, or purpose; it merely exists to fill the cosmos with difference and vibrancy. However, color is the stickiest of things, taking on anything that lightly brushes the color presence. "[F]eelings do things, and they affect what they come into contact

with.”¹¹⁹ Disgust is not something that comes from an object; instead, it is a feeling that is attributed to an object.¹²⁰ Green is not filled with disgust inherently, nor with sickness. Red is not memories of a lost mother and the ache that comes with it. However, color has come into contact or proximity to things of disgust, sickness, and devastation, and been affected by those *“histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs.”*¹²¹ The simplest of touches—visible, linguistic, or any other—impresses upon the color, changing the way it exists in the world, changing, for limited time (in the scale of the universe) the way the world sees and experiences the color.

These are restrictions, limitations on what color can do. It turns color into a singularity, something that condenses to the point of impulsion, a bright star draining itself into nothingness and eventual rebirth as something else. When taken on an individual level, the constrictions of color produce violent emotional responses. If taken to a larger, collective position these constrictions can turn color into a weapon of oppression and fear. In chapter two, I referenced the color-coded terror alert system central to Brian Massumi’s essay on fear. The terror alert system was introduced in 2002 as a way to inform the public of the likelihood a terrorist attack would occur: green, “low;” blue, “guarded;” yellow, “elevated;” orange, “high;” red, “severe.” From its inception until its discontinuance in 2011, the alert level changed seventeen times, mostly from yellow to orange with one use of red. Green and blue were never used, and as Massumi noted, *“‘Safe’ doesn’t merit a hue. Safe, it would seem, has fallen off the spectrum of perception. Insecurity, the spectrum says, is the new normal.”* The system functioned as a producer of fear. To raise the alert level came with press conferences and discussions, and to lower was done in silence. The government embroiled the population in a

game of perpetual jumpiness; fear became a national “neuronal network,” a “habitual function.”¹²²

The necessity for a pragmatics of uncertainty to which the color system alerts us is related to a change in the nature of the object of power. The formlessness and contentlessness of its exercise in no way means that power no longer has an object. It means that the object of power is correspondingly formless and contentless.¹²³

What is telling when considering Massumi’s analysis of the terror system is this need for “contentlessness” when expressing the political will of the government’s power. Instead of simply using words, the system deployed color as signifiers of terror. The formless concept of threat needs a formless expression, and color may be the most effective for such a function. By wrangling color into the literal boxes of threat levels, the government used the display and name of a color to call forth fear—an affect of control and direction. The “affective modulation” needed the amorphous potentiality of color to most efficiently network the emotional status of the populace. That is, color opened the possibilities for collective fear.

In *Blue*, we see something else than the fascistic micropolitics of the terror alerts and disgusting greens of cultural tranquility (passivity). The blue becomes a molecular revolution of affective change and propulsion towards the limitless. As Deleuze and Guattari write, “Becoming-minoritarian is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power, an active micropolitics. This is the opposite of macropolitics, and even of History, in which it is a question of knowing how to win or obtain a majority.”¹²⁴ Micropolitics are politics of desire, finding the unseen and lingering mutations—the dense tanglings of affects and lines—and disruptions-in-

waiting (and disruptions-in-process) within the suprastructures. A micropolitics of color becoming enveloped and engrained in blue gives the body over to the collective struggle against the “familialist repressions,” to become an expression of excess and ruptures.¹²⁵ The color overwhelms the world not with a single feeling, but a free flowing expanse of affectivity. *Blue*'s color continuously shifts and combines sensations and subjectivities into a collective desire of blueness. The blue is an expression of a way of being in the world in color. By turning bodies, space, and synesthetic color into one, a “universal love” as Jarman terms it, annihilates the structures of oppression between the color and the line; spectator and screen; object, subject, and thing; and visual and avisual.

The politics of color then is a politics of synesthetic gathering. Whereas PT used collective politics to transverse the limitations and structures of bureaucratic power, color's collective politics transverses the structures of sensations, thus, becoming a powerful tool for radical reconfiguration. *Blue*'s synesthetic color transversality makes clear the difference (politically and affectively) between the representation of living with AIDS and the expression of the inevitable death from AIDS. This molecular revolution in color disrupted medium specificity and color's own history allowing an expression of queerness with AIDS that denies the sentimentalizing pity of representation.

I realize the ease with which I have turned towards the grandiose, and near a description of a transcendent color, something I do not wish to achieve. Claims that color is a means to destroying the fascist machine, or any other for that matter, is too far beyond *Blue* and this project. A praxis for color is difficult not only for color's long history of dismissal, but for its inconsistency. The physicality and human producers make PT and the terror alert system

powerful in their praxis. Color lacks that necessary base form, it must take its worldly presence from that which it touches and consumes. However, if allowed to freely spread and pull into itself, color can bring a new way of seeing, a new orientation with the world.

The intent of this project is to make the case for a political engagement with color. Without a full consideration of color's politics, it can easily be used for politically repressive and destructive tasks. It is necessary to try to examine the contours of color—how it exists in the world, what it desires, what it can do, and the effects it can have. The philosophical challenges a color lets loose on form and sensations are exciting and revelatory, and if taken seriously, could lead to substantial political defiance to how we see the world, how we engage with the animate and inanimate (organic and inorganic), and the limits to physically and emotionally experiencing the world.

Or maybe the most provocative claim and potentiality made present in *Blue* is that to engage with the world is to see color perpetually consuming, existing everywhere, and flowing effortless out of and over everything. As Jarman termed blue, it is a “terrestrial paradise” of “universal love”—a limitless opening within, upon, and of color.

NOTES

¹ Genosko, *Felix Guattari: An Aberrant Introduction*, 59.

² Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 140.

³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 140.

⁴ An important note here that will be relevant later in the thesis. My use of sensation, similar to the evolving notion of color, moves from the bodily to the apersonal and affective. In chapter two, sensation is seen as the senses—sight, sound, touch, smell, taste. In chapter three and the conclusion, sensation is linked to how Deleuze uses the term in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* where sensations are the ways and whats that are felt and experienced in the world, the affects that emerge out of the body and circulate through the world, and the bodily impetus of phenomenological experience. My use of the term attempts to consider the more Guattarian contours of the term. That is, the act or process of affective movement, the tumbling and colliding of the avisual and immaterial forces of phenomena that specifically exists beyond the relationships of humans to other presences. While Deleuze never necessitates a relationship of the human to sensation, I wish to engage fully and explicitly with sensation as it is and not constrictively in its role with the human.

⁵ Stich, *Yves Klein*, 67–68.

⁶ Ellis, *Derek Jarman's Angelic Conversations*, 233.

⁷ Garfield, "Derek Jarman: Into Blue."

⁸ Ellis, *Angelic Conversations*, 109.

⁹ Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*, 83.

¹⁰ Jarman, *Dancing Ledge*, 241.

¹¹ Ellis, *Angelic Conversations*, 42.

¹² *Ibid.*, note 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴ UK Parliament, "Local Government Act 1988." "Homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality" and to "promote the teaching in any maintained school of the acceptability of homosexuality as a pretended family relationship."

¹⁵ Jarman, *Modern Nature*, 177.

¹⁶ Jarman, *Blue*, 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7–8.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

²¹ Wollen, "Blue," 195–6.

²² Romney, "Living colour slowly fades."; Holden, "A Movie Where All the Motion is Metaphorical."

- ²³ Romney, "Living colour slowly fades"; "Review: Blue," Variety.
- ²⁴ Holden, "A Movie Where All the Motion is Metaphorical."
- ²⁵ Ricco, *The Logic of the Lure*, 44.
- ²⁶ "Review: Blue," Variety; Murphy, "The faces of AIDS."
- ²⁷ Romney, "Living colour slowly fades"; Clark, "Review — Blue."
- ²⁸ Lawrence, "AIDS, the Problem of Representation, & Plurality," 252.
- ²⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, note 38.
- ³⁰ Jarman, *Blue*, 15.
- ³¹ Khalip and Mitchell, *Releasing the Image*, 23.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 6.
- ³³ Ashton, "Derek Jarman's Blue: Negating the Visual." 295.
- ³⁴ Khalip, "Archeology of Sound," 75.
- ³⁵ Nancy, *Listening*, 14.
- ³⁶ Vallorani, "Path(o)s of Mourning," 85.
- ³⁷ Jarman, *Blue*, 21–22.
- ³⁸ Lawrence, "AIDS, the Problem of Representation, & Plurality," 258.
- ³⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 292.
- ⁴⁰ Smith, *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture*, 15.
- ⁴¹ Jarman, *Blue*, 10.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 4–5.
- ⁴³ Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, 87–88.
- ⁴⁴ Kalmus, "Color Consciousness," 26–27.
- ⁴⁵ Lippit, *Ex-Cinema: From a Theory of Experimental Film and Video*, 24.
- ⁴⁶ Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, 85.
- ⁴⁷ Aristotle quoted in Brian Price, "Color, The Formless, and Cinematic Eros," 78.
- ⁴⁸ Batchelor, *Chromophobia*, 23.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 31.
- ⁵⁰ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 43.
- ⁵¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 74.
- ⁵² Kalmus, "Color Consciousness," 24.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 25.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 26–7.

⁵⁵ The main job of color consultants was to actually help keep colors from conflicting or hiding others. This was to ensure that Cary Grant's torso did not blend in with his background, thus breaking his body into odd and disturbing sections. However, it was still within the contracts to pull production if the demands of Technicolor were not satisfactorily met.

⁵⁶ Brian Price, "Color, The Formless, and Cinematic Eros," 79.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 80–1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁹ Blake, "In Conversation: John Baldessari and Jeremy Blake," 165.

⁶⁰ Jarman, *Chroma*, 104.

⁶¹ Guy Deustcher, interview by Tim Howard, *Radiolab*, May 21, 2012.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ "Why Isn't the Sky Blue?" *Radiolab*, May 21, 2012.

⁶⁴ Bulina, et al. "New Class of Blue Animal Pigments Based on Frizzled and Kringle Protein Domains."

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Jules Davidoff, interview by Tim Howard, *Radiolab*, May 21, 2012.

⁶⁷ Brakhage, "Metaphors on Vision," 12.

⁶⁸ Lippit, *Ex-Cinema*, 23

⁶⁹ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 44.

⁷⁰ Massumi, "Fear (The Spectrum Said)."

⁷¹ Marks, "Video Haptics and Erotics," 332.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Lippit, *Ex-Cinema*, 15.

⁷⁴ Vivian Sobchack, "Fleshing Out the Image: Phenomenology, Pedagogy, and Derek Jarman's Blue," 198.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁷⁹ Gass, *On Being Blue: A Philosophical Inquiry*, 34.

⁸⁰ MacCormack, "A Cinema of Desire: Cinesexuality and Guattari's Asignifying Cinema," 11.

⁸¹ Lippit, *Ex-Cinema*, 25.

⁸² Jarman, *Blue*, 18.

⁸³ Lippit, *Ex-Cinema*, 26.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 137.

⁸⁶ Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-aesthetic Paradigm*, 18.

⁸⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 292.

⁸⁸ Guattari, "Transversality," 17-18.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Genosko, *An Aberrant Introduction*, 57.

⁹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 291.

⁹² The synesthetic qualities of *Blue* can be considered far wider than just vision, hearing, and touch. The relationship between the blue after-image that stains the vision matches the lingering presence of an after-taste or even the stabbing continuance of a rancid smell. These are valuable expansions and will be confronted in a longer work on *Blue*, color, and synesthetic affectivity.

⁹³ Ibid., 307.

⁹⁴ Genosko, *An Aberrant Introduction*, 55.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁹⁷ Stern, quoted in Bertelsen and Murphie, "An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers: Felix Guattari on Affect and the Refrain," 147.

⁹⁸ Ellis, *Angelic Conversations*, 233.

⁹⁹ Peake, *Derek Jarman: A Biography*, 473-4.

¹⁰⁰ Jarman, *Smiling in Slow Motion*, 11.1.93. Jarman nearly predicates the coming release of Hollywood's Philadelphia.

¹⁰¹ Peake, *Derek Jarman*, 527.

¹⁰² Stern, quoted in Bertelsen and Murphie, "An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers: Felix Guattari on Affect and the Refrain," 147.

¹⁰³ Guattari, *Molecular Revolutions: Psychiatry and Politics*, 257.

¹⁰⁴ Lippit, *Ex-Cinema*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Guattari, *Chaosmosis*, 9.

¹⁰⁶ Genosko, *An Aberrant Introduction*, 107.

¹⁰⁷ Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 292

¹⁰⁹ My description of PT comes from Gary Genosko's *The Party Without Bosses: Lessons on Anti-Capitalism from Felix Guattari and Luis Iancio 'Lula' da Silva.* Genosko's book provides a fascinating discussion and analysis on PT's beginnings, struggles, and rise to power, along with Guattari's fascination with the radical political organization. *Without Bosses* also includes an interview between Guattari and

Lula that offers both a theoretical consideration on collective politics and the grounded realities of attempting such a decentered formation in an ever expanding, globalized economy and politics.

¹¹⁰ Guattari, "Everybody Wants to Be A Facist," 158–9.

¹¹¹ The PT's slogan response being: "We know how to work; we know how to govern."

¹¹² As opposed to capitalist subjectivity where capital forms a similar collective desire of the interactions of a multiplicity of bodies that becomes the accepted and desired subjectivity of all. In other words, the collective becomes the singular—similar, though less suffocating, to the totalitarian politics of fascism. This goes against the far more open, conflicting, and shifting collective of PT's radical politics.

¹¹³ See Deleuze and Guattari's stunning plateau, "1933: Micropolitics and Segmentarity" in *A Thousand Plateaus* and Guattari's essay "Everybody Wants to be a Fascist" found in *Chaosophy*.

¹¹⁴ Nagisa Oshima, "Banishing Green," 119.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 118.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 119.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 120, 118.

¹¹⁸ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 85.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid., 90.

¹²² Massumi, "Fear (The Spectrum Said)," 2–3.

¹²³ Ibid., 5.

¹²⁴ Guattari, *Molecular Revolutions*, 258.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

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