DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 509 CS 506 839

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TITLE Death in Miami: AIDS, Gender, and Representation.
PUB DATE 26 May 89
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (39th, San Francisco, CA, May 25-29, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome; *Commercial Television; Cultural Context; *Homosexuality; *Mass Media Role; Stereotypes; Television Research
IDENTIFIERS *Miami Vice (Television Series); Prime Time Television; Television Criticism

ABSTRACT

In "God's Work," an episode of the "Miami Vice" television series in which a gay character comes home to reunite with a childhood friend and ex-lover who is dying of AIDS, the show is at odds with itself over the issue of sexuality and AIDS. At one level, that of the "coming-out" story of the main character, it presents the gay character in a positive light, and sets him up for a positive reception through a number of narrative and gender-related codes. In contrast, through its use of production related codes, it presents his relationship as incomplete, and his sexuality as a prison, with the final moral message being that the price of virtue is solitude. These same production codes present persons with AIDS as being stigmatized aliens who cannot be approached closer than at arm's length, while at the same time arguing through the narrative for sympathy and understanding for persons with AIDS. (Seventeen references are attached.) (RS)

Death in Miami: AIDS, Gender, and Representation

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Paper Presented for Popular Culture Interest Group
International Communication Association
San Francisco, CA
May 26, 1989

Death in Miami - Gender, AIDS, and Representation

Vito Russo (1987, 1986, 1985) and other critics of gay-themed programming such as William Henry (1987) have observed that television has learned to tell two types of gay stories well. The first of these is the "coming-out" story, in which the gay character reveals his (gender pronoun used deliberately) sexuality to other characters, oftentimes parents. The other story involves the death of gay characters, not infrequently at the hands of a male protagonist. An episode of Miami Vice entitled "God's Work," (1987) brought these two scenarios together in a way that provides a cogent example of how prime-time network television deals with gay characters, sexuality, and the issue of AIDS.

Ann Swidler (1984) has suggested that contemporary television criticism can be divided into two categories, that of "reflection theory" and of "manipulation theory" - in the first, content in television is a reflection of the concerns and issues facing the society. In the second, what appears on television is determined by those in charge of programming practices. As salient of these respective positions, we can use the works of Horace Newcomb and Todd Gitlin. Newcomb and Hirsch (1987) argue that television is a "cultural forum" in which the medium presents us with a multiplicity of meanings rather than a monolithic presentation of a dominant point of view." Drawing on James Carey's definition of "ritual communication," television is a popular, pluralist medium, and functions within a space of negotiation within the culture. Television is neither exclusively emancipatory, nor irrevocably restrictive.

On the other hand, Gitlin, in his discussion of gay issues on television, argues that right-wing pressure groups have an influence on television disproportionate to their numbers, and that commercial consideration is

ultimately triumphant over progressive treatment of gay themes. He states: "TV's treatment of homosexuals has been something of a bellwether. Network executives like to travel down the middle of the road, as they construe it." He then presents a mini-history of gay television from the 70's and early eighties to trace the influence of the New Right on programming practices (1983, pp. 337-40). His interpretation suggests the networks play a role as cautious mediators, not wishing to offend, and as a result, ultimately saying little of consequence.

Another concept that I wish to employ in this discussion of the process by which gay issues are transformed into television situations is the oft-cited concept of liminality, which has been abducted from anthropology to serve the theoretical designs of American Cultural Studies. Originally set in the cultural anthropology of Victor Turner (1977), as condensed by Newcomb and Alley (1983) the liminal is "a stage of license, when the rules may be broken or bent, when roles may be reversed, when categories and restrictions may be overturned."

In television, this liminal principle comes most clearly into play in the process of converting cultural issues into narrative situations. For example, the Western provides a narrative space remote in literal space and time from present concerns. In application to the particular case at hand, Christopher Anderson (1986) has discussed, how the soiled utopias of Hawaii and Miami have often served this role in prime-time crime genres. He says, "The colonial outpost (formerly Hawaii) now lies within our borders -- a sign of retrenchment in the face of American vulnerability in the world.." In Miami Vice, the location oftentimes has only a tenuous link to the Miami of "reality." In fact, one of the more frequently stated criticisms of the show is that it fails to accurately represent the city. (See Altman, 1988) Such criticisms miss the point that the Miami of Miami Vice is a mythic location. As Michael Mann has stated, his intention is not realism, but spectacle. His comment, "Miami is

the Casablanca of America," while self-serving in its linkage to classical Hollywood film, gives credence to the narrative locale as a liminal, rather than a literal space.

Background - Miami Vice

The show's name says much of what one needs to know about the program's setting and franchise. The paired protagonists, the blond ex-college football star and Vietnam vet Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson) and his afro-latin partner, the saxophone wielding Rico Tubbs (Philip Michael Thomas) are undercover vice cops involved in a holding action against the tide of corruption of drugs, prostitution, and loansharking that supports the legitimate economy of the "Gold Coast." The setting and occupation thus provides these characters with their license to meddle in the affairs of a variety of transient characters that are killed, jailed, or self-destruct over the course of the series.

While the show is primarily episodic (problems are raised and solutions provided within an hour show), there is an effort made to provide the characters with a consistent backstory that oftentimes provides a ground for their actions and motivations. The series is not, however, evolutionary in the same sense as Hill St. or L.A. Law, which feature a variety of continuing storylines, with a single narrative closure in each episode. Rather it is something of a return to a more traditional generic form, albeit with a significant departure in visual style. Richard Jamesom summarized Miami Vice's station within recent innovations in television programming,

> "Miami Vice does much less violence to the traditional fromat of the weekly television series. Episodes tell self-contained stories of crimebusting, with a villain of the week to be savored and usually, dispatched before the hour is up. The vice squad isn't nearly as popululous

as the Hill St. precinct house, and even within these reduced terms, to guns Sonny Crockett and Rico Tubbs bear most of the dramatic brunt." (1985, pp. 56)

The show itself has been a mixed commercial and critical success. NBC commissioned the series from creator Anthony Yerkovich and producer Michael Mann for the 1984-5 season. Mann, a former writer and director for Hill St. Blues, has consistently stated that his aim for the show has been to produce a "cinematic" series, one in which visual elements were foregrounded. At times this has come at the expense of a coherent narrative. As Miami Vice entered its second and third seasons, riding the wake of it's entry into the Nielsen top 10, narrative occasionally threatened to disappear entirely. One especially reviled episode focussed on the invasion of Miami by Japanese Mafiosi, a scenario that was taken as particularly incongruous.

More recently, following diminished ratings and a spate of "What's wrong with Miami Vice" articles, Mann has directed his attention back into the show, and the quality of the scripts has improved. However, considering the show's extremely high production costs (up to $1.4 million an episode), modest ratings (#41 on Nov 28), and the flagging secondary market for 1 hour syndicated series, the show will be terminated this coming spring. Therefore, the 1987 example under consideration here can be regarded as "mature" Miami Vice, coming after the restablization of the production, but prior to the closing episodes of the series.

Miami Vice has been the focus of much academic criticism since its inception several years ago. For two examples, Fiske (1987) argues the show is a celebration of the capitalist spectacle of consumption, and Ross (1986, 1987) takes on the issue of the show as a mirage of surfaces - a vacuous postmodernist mirage of the phallic, with the homosocial bonding relationship of the protagonists being coded primarily through clothing (style) and by their relative physical attractiveness in contrast with the antagonists and helpers in

the series. The fundamental critical denominator of these lines of analysis has framed Miami Vice as a critical lightning rod for postmodernist criticism of the empty signifier. It is into this arena that the issue of AIDS, and of gay sexuality is now imposed.

In the 80's the issue of AIDS has served to both move the existence of gay persons to the forefront of popular consciousness, and at the same time allowed the placing of an additional stigma upon us. In the early 80's Michael Denneney wrote, "The big lie about gay people is that we don't exist." Today, we are on the television screen each day, albeit by being newscast as "carriers," "positives," and "victims." Narrative TV has capitalized upon this cultural opening to present a new videotype - that of gay characters coping or not coping with the disease.

In this particular episode of Miami Vice, "God's Work," a gay character comes home to reunite with a childhood friend and ex-lover who is dying of the disease. This plotline is commingled with one relating to the gay character's role as youngest son in a nuclear crime family under investigation by Crockett and Tubbs. A third dimension is added by the murder of the gay character's uncle, a Catholic priest who has run a AIDS hospice.

As I hope to demonstrate in my analysis, the show is at odds with itself over the issue of sexuality and AIDS. At one level, that of the coming-out story of the main character, it presents the gay character in a positive light, and sets him up for a positive reception through a number of narrative and gender-related codes. In contrast, through its use of production related codes, it presents his relationships as incomplete, and his sexuality as a prison with the final moral message being that the price of virtue is solitude. I'll also discuss how these same production codes presents AIDS, and persons with the disease as being stigmatized aliens who cannot be approached closer than arm's length, while at the same time the same time arguing through the narrative for sympathy and understanding for persons with AIDS.

The ultimate goal of the essay is to provide a constructive critique from within of the reflection theory/cultural forum critical perspective, pointing out the limitations of its populist perspective through the illumination of some of the mechanisms by which gay characters and themes are both supported and constrained on network television. The secondary objective is to argue for the existence of a greater depth of meaning in Miami Vice as a text than some critics have previously allowed for, on the basis of an analysis of the narrative, its characterizations, and its production techniques.

Professional Homosociality

Within the context of this paper's concerns with homosexuality, there are aspects of Crockett and Tubbs relationship as "partners" that bear discussion. This partnership relationship is often foregrounded in police drama as the primary bonding relationship of an officer's life (examples: Gannnon and Friday [Dragnet], Starsky and Hutch, Renko and Hill [Hill St. Blues]), frequently outlasting marriage (in Crockett's case, two marriages: one to a wife who divorces him at the beginning of the series, and a later, ratings-induced matrimony to pop star Sheena Easton). Eve Sedgwick (1985) has characterized these types of relationships as "homosocial" based on the male bonding relationship, functioning to the exclusion of women, and the feminization of those who oppose the bonded relationship.

A second dynamic of the relationship between the protagonists that carries cultural baggage is the pairing of the fair and the dark companions. A mythological pairing continually repeated in American literature at least back to the era of Natty Bumpo and Chingachgook, Huck Finn and Jim, or the Lone Ranger and Tonto[1]. Leslie Fielder's classic article Come Back to the

[1] A popular reflection of the homosexual aspects of these relationships comes out in a satire of The Lone Ranger, entitled Thank-you Masked Man, by Lenny Bruce. In this piece, the Lone Ranger is driven out of town after telling the residents that he wants Tonto "to perform an

Raft ag'in Huck Honey (1948) articulates this longstanding narrative relationship in a somewhat idealized form.

Andrew Ross (1987, p.327) takes up the thread of this argument in his analysis of Vice, saying, "In the potentially unstable world of Miami Vice, the interethnic male bond is so central a narrative agent that its stability is constantly open to redefinition, reinforced as it is, by the successive rebuttal of each attempt made by a woman to violate its working space." While some of the inpenetrability of the relationship can be explained by the constraints of format and formula, (See Swidler (above) for a discussion of the limitations of romance in episodic TV), and while the relationship between Crockett and Tubbs is more closely equal than its literary precursors, Ross' basic point is a plausible one.

The depiction of gay characters in prime-time has tended to fall into certain categories. First, openly gay characters have traditionally been introduced into narratives as isolated figures, and are also played against type. Two examples from 70's television serve to illustrate this point. The socially conscious situation comedies, Mash, and All in the Family, both "dealt" with gay characters that were introduced, problematized, and resolved within an episode as examples of liberal social tolerance. In AITF, Archie is confounded when an effeminate man he thinks is gay turns out to be straight, and when a friend who is a 'regular guy,' macho type turns out to be gay. Of course, Archie's bigoted response is set up, and then ridiculed, within the schemata of the Lear sitcom.

The second example, from MASH, is nearly parallel in its development. A several-times decorated war hero is brought into the hospital with injuries. The character turns out to have some injuries that were not related to battle, rather incurred in a fistfight the night before. He's lionized by Frank Burns,

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unnatural act."

but then comes out to Hawkeye, saying that in the fight there were two guys hurt, "one was black, one a homosexual." The character then makes it clear to Hawkeye that he wants to be released as soon as possible to return to battle, where he can once again prove his bravery, and implicitly, his manhood. Burns discovers the gay character's sexuality, and moves to have the soldier discharged, but then the plot moves on to have Hawkeye and B.J. blackmail Frank into silence by tricking him into admitting he's cheated on his medical board exams.

In both of these examples, a bigoted character is set-up for a liberal moralization regarding social tolerance. The characters in both instances are coded as highly conventional masculine types - one a blue collar worker, the other a decorated warrior. No doubt, the types here were cast in an effort to present a secondary message - that gay men are indistinguishable from straight men, except in their sexual orientation, arging that gays are just like "real people." However, in neither case is the character seen in a relationship, or even with, with another gay character.

More recently, in the spate of AIDS melodramas - such as An Early Frost, when gay characters are presented in relationships, they are presented as practically chaste companions, that are ultimately reincorporated into the family unit, almost as the "roommates" they might appear to be to the unsuspecting neighbors. Darryl Yates Rist observes,

> "the model for the gay relationship is insidious: they act as little more than buddies. While no one expects NBC to show the Pierson boy and Peter tonguing[2] on the TV screen, a little hugging, a few tears - something in their private moments would have helped to validate their love, or dramatize that these two guys are more than roommates, more than best friends who fuck offscreen. An Early Frost would

[2] A question one may well ask is, "why not?" Considering the amount of steamy passion and sculpted bodies on display during prime time, perhaps a little gay sex might be a good thing.

> seduce its audience with "acceptance" so that, once gays are out in the open, it seems, straights can control them better. In the underground, conformity can't be enforced. (1986, p. 50)

What is served to us in God's Work is "a little hugging, a few tears." along with a catastrophic disruption of the family structure, as a tragedy brought about by the crimes of the father but brought to a head by the son's disruption of the family unit. The show presents the moral dynamics of the episode structured in a set of oppositions ordered around the dynamics of the Cruz family. In order to demonstrate this, it's first necessary to describe some of the background of the program. (I apologize for the length of the following synopsis, but the relationships between characters are difficult to make sense of without it.)

The program opens with the Miami Vice team on a stakeout of the Miami waterfront, waiting for Franchesco Cruz (Francesco Quinn) to show up for a meeting with Rico (a Vice cop), to negotiate the sale of some stolen merchandise. The meeting is interrupted when the second Cruz son, Phillips (Esai Morales), unexpectedly steps off a yacht docked at the pier. The return of the prodigal blows the stakeout, but a new problem is now posed for the police as well: why, after a long absence, has Phillippe come home? Questions ensue, and it is hypothesized that Phillippe, back from a brief stint on Wall St. following his tenure at Berkeley and Yale Law School, has come home to take over the family finances, and launder money for his father's (Olek Krupa) syndicate.

Meanwhile at the Cruz home, there are questions as well. Mother (Rosana De Soto) asks why Phillippe has come home. He answers, "Because the people I love are all here." At a party given in Phillippe's honor, tension flares between the brothers, when Phillippe's uncle, Nesto Lupe (Jonathan Del Arco) (Phillippe's Mother's brother), a catholic priest proposes a toast to Phillippe's return.

The next day we see Phillippe at Nesto Lupe's mission - an AIDS hospice. As he goes in, he's harassed by a youth who takes his Jaguar and fashionable style of dress as signs of gayness. We enter the hospice, and Gina, a Vice cop, observes and photographs the meeting between Phillippe, Lupe, and an unidentified man.

It's revealed the Lt. Castillo, the moral center of Miami Vice, is old friends with Fr. Lupe, as they were both civil rights workers in the 60's. That evening, he informally questions Lupe, finding out than Lupe does not know for certain why Phillippe has returned home. Following the meeting, Lupe returns home and is killed by an unidentified man, of whom we see only a silenced pistol, a hand with a shirtsleeve and jacket cuff exposed, and dress shoes. An investigation is begun at the close of Act I by the police to uncover the killer.

In the Act II, we are given more information about the relationship between Castillo and Lupe, that they were close friends and share many of the same values. Castillo suspects Lupe was killed by mobsters who resented the AIDS hospice. When the church tries to surreptitiously close down the ward, Castillo leans on the Archdiocese to keep it open, quietly threatening the Church with bad publicity. Following Lupe's funeral, Gina gets close to Phillippe, and discovers he's sincere about helping the hospice to stay open, dispelling suspicion the hospice was a front for illegal operations. Tubbs meets again with Francesco, who say's despite rumors Phillippe has come home to take over, the he's still in charge.

However, it's turned out that the unidentified man observed at the hospice is Luis Garcia, son of fellow mobster Ernesto Garcia, and childhood friend of Phillippe Cruz, leading the Vice team to suspect that a 'corporate merger may be underway between the Garcia family and the Cruz family. Crockett and Switeck stake out the Cruz mansion, and observe Phillippe leaving in a hurry. Castillo follows Phillippe, where it turns out he's gone to

see Luis in a Church run hospital where he's about to die of AIDS. In a tearful scene, Luis and Phillippe embrace, and Luis dies. Castillo talks with Phillippe, and is told that the reason Phillippe returned to Miami was to be with Luis, and he has no interest in the crime syndicate. The Act ends with Phillippe telling Castillo, "It's time Jorge Cruz met his son - his real son."

Act III is brief. Set at the Cruz mansion, it begins with Phillippe having already come out to his father and brother. His brother is outraged, but the father is stoic. When Phillips inquires as to his father's relative calm, he replies that he knew, that Luis Garcia's father told him. Jorge mentions that everything will be ok, now that Ernesto is out of the way. He blames the priest for polluting Phillippe's mind saying, "may he burn in hell," and tells Phillippe that he killed Ernesto, and that he blames himself for is son's sexuality. Phillippe is infuriated, and explains to his father that he's known he was gay since he was 12, that the only person he could talk to about his secret was the priest, and that his sexuality isn't anyone's fault, but rather a fact, "like brown eyes and grey hair." At this point we see mother enter the room with a gun. As the Vice cops enter just behind her, she shoots Jorge, wounding him in the shoulder, and shattering a large, handblown glass vase, which shatters in slow motion, spilling a cascade of blue marbles across the floor of the room. The Vice cops arrest Jorge for Fr. Ernesto's murder. Finis.

In God's Work, we can see an extension of some of the traditional themes of the prime-time homosexual drama. First, a gay character is played against type, where the other characters in the drama assume the gay character to be straight. In the episode this is reinforced in several ways. First, at the party in Act I, a beautiful blonde comes up to Phillippe and casually kisses him on the cheek. He responds by smiling graciously, and an implicitly straight relationship is established between the characters. At a Vice cop meeting at the very opening of the episode, Trudy mentions "the social editor of the Times put him Manhattan's most eligible list." Gina, who is assigned to tail

Phillippe, indicates at several points that she finds his appearance attractive.

An intertextual reference comes in the relationship between Mother and Son. Both actors, Rosana De Soto and Ace Morales were paired as mother and son in the highly popular film La Bamba, which had been released only several months before. In that film, Morales played a promiscuous heterosexual, and the combination sets up an unconscious expectation of a character of like inclinations. In these ways the now familiar device of setting up a gay character to be assumed as straight is used to further the narrative's misdirection of our attention in the solving of the mystery of Phillippe's reappearance.

The narrative privileges the acceptance of the gay character in a number of ways. He's presented throughout as a sensitive and sympathetic character. Respectful to his parents, his uncle the priest, caring about his former lover, and willing to press to keep the AIDS clinic open, he shows his ultimate virtuousness by, just prior to his mother's shooting spree, telling his father that, as a lawyer he has sworn to uphold the law, and that he must turn his father in. In doing so, he is definitively revealed as being aligned with the forces of the law.

However, the price of Phillips's virtue is his solitude. As Michel Foucault made an analysis of sexual ethics and sexual purity in his Sexuality and Solitude, an analysis of St. Augustine's and the pagan philosopher, Artemidorus' writings. Near the conclusion of the article, he summarizes:

> Real purity is not acquired when one can lie down with a young an beautiful boy without even touching him, as Socrates did with Alcibiades. A monk was really chaste when no impure image occurred in his mind, even during dreams. The criterion of purity does not consist in keeping control of oneself even in the presence of the most desirable people: it consists in discovering the truth in oneself and defeating the illusions in oneself, in cutting out the images and thoughts one's mind continually produces. (1985, pp 371-2)

It is no accident that the character to which Phillippe is closest is the priest, Fr. Ernesto. Phillippe's process of chaste coming-out to his family parallels an example presented in the narrative by Lt. Castillo. When questioned about whether Lupe might be gay, Castillo remarks, "a pretty woman would turn his head as fast as anyone's. He had some real doubts four or five years ago about keeping his vows." Clearly the priest (in his process of coming to terms with his chastity) has gone through an inner purification, and come out the stronger and more virtuous for it.

Along the same lines, Phillippe has come to terms with his sexuality, but in the process, is forced to sacrifice both his relationship and his family. At the end of Act II, we see Phillippe come to meet Luis at his deathbed. The establishing shot of the scene is an extreme close up of a crucifix, with the suffering Christ brutally nailed to the cross, making
the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world. This signifier can be interpreted as describing two (if not more) sets of relations. First, the suffering of Luis, the terminal AIDS patient. Second, the ritual loss through the death of his former lover of Phillippe's only contact with the gay world within the text. At the moment of Luis' death, Phillippe cries, "No! Please don't leave me...alone."

This isolation of gay characters is reinforced through the camerawork in the scene in other ways as well. In God's Work the camera is careful not to get too close to anyone with AIDS, as if contact more intimate than a medium shot could expose the viewer to the virus. When Phillippe first visits the hospice, we survey the inside of the clinic from a high point within the room. The camera then moves to Phillippe and Gina, who speak briefly while Fr. Lupe approaches. As Ernesto guides Phillippe back to where Luis is sitting, we pass several patients. The first we see being assisted into his bed. He's

first shown from the back, and then as he turns to a three-quarter view the camera cuts away before the patient completes the motion far enough to be clearly seen. As Ernesto and Phillippe walk to the back of the clinic, we dolly past several patients, all male. We see only the briefest glimpse of their faces, but they echo the distant images we're familiar with from news reports of dying homosexuals. Never does the camera get close to a patient's face, never does the camera, in its discretion, linger on a patient. The AIDS patients are the untouchables, and even to dwell upon their image is unwise.

The only character with a speaking role to actually touch an AIDS patient is Phillippe, at Luis' deathbed. As they are reunited, the camera pans into Luis' sickroom. While at this point the camera rests on Phillippe and Luis, again it is cautious, even at the emotional peak of the drama, not to get closer than a medium shot. In the following scene, as Castillo questions Phillippe, he's seen from behind an iron stairway, in an image of extreme alienation, with Castillo standing above him in a dominant position. Having made his sacrifice (through the loss of his friend) he is now purified, and ready for the confrontation with his father.

From a structural perspective the Cruz house is a house divided. On the one hand the father and the eldest son are the upholders of the phallic power of the family. As the heterosexual males, they carry the ability to carry on the family name. On the other side we have the feminized half of the family, centered around the figure of the mother. Included are the males who are not reproductive, the chaste brother-in-law, and the gay younger son. It is in this half of the family that the moral virtue is imbued[3]. In Act III, when Phillippe

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[3] A few of these opposition can be presented as follows:

Mother :: Father
younger son :: older son
sacred :: profane
nurturant :: instrumental
law :: crime
home :: world

has come out to his family, the father and son start a discussion about who should run the family business. Mother interrupts, saying, "Is this what it's really about? Greed, money, power. Always the same with you..." Phillippe's moral epiphany is when he acts on his vow as a lawyer to uphold the law, in the same way that the priest's vow of chastity is a pledge to a different ideal.

The mediating influence between the law, as represented by the police, and Phillippe, is Lt. Castillo. A singularly silent character, his reserved manner and black attire (in contrast with the flashy clothes of all the other Vice cops) make him the monklike arbiter of the law in the series. He too, has suffered the loss of his wife during Vietnam, and lives in isolation from the others on the team, and his character is responsible primarily to his inner moral voice. It is Castillo who is the connection from the outside world to the Cruz home, and it is he who arrives at the hospice at the moment of Luis's death, as a helper in Phillippe's transition into the realm of the law.

Ultimately, Phillippe undergoes his ritual purification, and has emerged as an actualized gay character, but at an enormous personal toll. He suffers the loss of his oldest friend and lover, his only apparent connection with the gay world, and the effect of his coming out is the destruction of his family: with the death of his uncle at his father's hand, the alienation of his brother, and his mother's assault upon his father. The fragile glass of the family unit has been shattered, and the precious beads contained within have been forever dispersed. Phillippe is out, but he is alone - a Phyrric victory at best.

At the same time, the narrative has made a number of "positive" statements about Phillippe's sexuality: He's a sympathetic character who makes the right choices, and is rewarded with the opportunity to score a variety of points on the "naturalness" of his condition. His pain in dealing with what has clearly been his burden is validated by the text, and his courage in coming to

terms and coming out is rewarded.

Less emancipatory here is the treatment of AIDS. While the relationship between Castillo and Lupe draws parallels between the Civil Rights movement and the need for compassionate treatment of persons with AIDS, in the show, AIDS is strictly a gay male disease. The camerawork and editing signifies that AIDS is dangerous, and persons with the disease are to be treated with caution. While Darryl Yates Rist has gotten his wish of a few hugs and a few tears in a prime time AIDS drama, one doubts that this is quite what he may have wished for.

What I have done here is in many ways artificial - the aesthetic fetishization of a particular episode of a particular television text, removed from the viewing context, and placed under the microscope for examination. Recently John Fiske (1987) has argued for an ethnographic semiotics, that investigates the processes of reception in real viewers. Clearly, a preferred reading of the type offered above is less likely to match the experience of the casual viewer, who takes their television in with a glance, rather than the gaze of the cinema. However, it seems that such readings, particularly coming from members of marginalized groups, have a place that is not yet completely filled in the academic discussion of television.

In a recent attack on what she terms the "yuppie-left" discourse on popular culture, Judith Williamson excoriates the tendency within cultural studies to claim that culture is emancipatory simply because it is popular. While my sympathy lies with cultural optimism, I'm less certain that the evidence supports the theory quite as strongly as we might hope. Showcasing an issue, like gay sexuality, or AIDS, is different from including a gay voice, or the voices of persons with AIDS as non-marginals within television. Populist is one thing, but egalitarian is another.

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