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## Shooting AIDS: A Comparison of Philadelphia and Les Nuits Fauves

### Abstract

*Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993), a Hollywood film, is concerned with AIDS, a topic, which has been ignored by mainstream cinema. The film reminds us of the other films on AIDS, and the ways in which the issue has been represented on the screen. This article aims to focus on *Philadelphia* and *Les Nuits Fauves* (Cyril Collard, 1992), a French film dealing with AIDS, which has gained cult status since its director died of AIDS. The article presents a brief overview on AIDS, and examines the two films mentioned above in terms of issues of the representation of AIDS, realism, Hollywood and French cinema.

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### AIDS'i Sinemalaştırmak: Philadelphia ile Yırtıcı Geceler adlı Filmlerin Karşılaştırılması

#### Özet

Bir Hollywood filmi olan *Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993), anaakım sinema tarafından ihmal edilmiş bir konu olan AIDS'i ele almaktadır. Film, aklımıza, AIDS üzerine yapılmış başka filmlerle bu konunun sinemadaki temsiliyetinin nasıl gerçekleştiği sorularını getirmektedir. Bu makale, *Philadelphia* ve yönetmenin AIDS'den ölümünden sonra kült film konumuna ulaşan, AIDS üzerine bir Fransız filmi olan *Yırtıcı Geceler* (*Les Nuits Fauves*, Cyril Collard, 1992) üzerinde durmaktadır. Makale, AIDS üzerine kısa bir değerlendirmeden sonra, yukarıda belirtilen iki filmi, AIDS'in sinemada temsili, gerçekçilik, Hollywood ve Fransız sineması gibi konular çerçevesinde incelemektedir.

## Shooting AIDS: A Comparison of Philadelphia and Les Nuits Fauves

<sup>1</sup> During its opening weekend, *Philadelphia* earned 12 million dollars, which brought a sense of relief to its producers (Mueller, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> According to Michel Ciment, *Les Nuits Fauves*' 'extraordinary critical and popular success was the most spectacular of the year' (1994: 160). *Les Nuits Fauves*, with 585.405 attendance, was one of the top grossing films in Paris during the 1992-93 seasons.

*Philadelphia* (Jonathan Demme, 1993), a mainstream American film, which had a reasonable success at the box office<sup>1</sup>, brought two global issues to the agenda one more time: the first is Hollywood, one of the sides of the conflict between popular film and "art" pictures; the second is AIDS, an incurable illness which is called "the plague of the century". *Philadelphia*, as a Hollywood movie about AIDS, a topic ignored by mainstream cinema, reminds us of the other films on AIDS, and the ways in which the issue has been represented on the screen. This essay aims to focus on *Philadelphia* and another film dealing with AIDS from France, *Les Nuits Fauves* (Cyril Collard, 1992), which also did well at the box office and has gained cult status since its director died of AIDS.<sup>2</sup> After a brief overview on AIDS and cinema, *Philadelphia* and *Les Nuits Fauves* will be discussed in terms of issues of the representation of AIDS, realism, Hollywood and French cinema.

### AIDS and cinema

AIDS, "acquired immune deficiency syndrome", is a viral disease which is transmitted by direct contamination of the bloodstream with body fluids containing the HIV virus: blood, semen and vaginal fluid. AIDS damages the immune system and a carrier of the virus is vulnerable to infection. AIDS was noticed by doctors in New York and California as early as 1979. It was introduced to the public by the New York Times of July 1981

under the headline "Rare Cancer Seen in 41 Homosexuals".<sup>3</sup> But in the course of time, although AIDS has been labelled as a "gay disease" through the influence of the mainstream media, it has become clear that intravenous drug users, hemophiliacs, Haitian immigrants into the United States, bisexuals and heterosexuals have also contracted AIDS; and also there has been a holocaust in parts of Africa because of AIDS.

AIDS, as Susan Sontag points out, "marks a turning point in current attitudes toward illness and medicine, as well as toward sexuality and toward catastrophe" (1990: 160). She notes that AIDS "no longer made it possible to regard sex as an adventure without consequences" (160). Similarly, Simon Watney stresses that AIDS caused a crisis over both the body and sex:

AIDS is not only a medical crisis on an unparalleled scale, it involves a crisis of representation itself, a crisis over the entire framing of knowledge about the human body and its capacities for sexual pleasure (1987: 9).

It has been claimed that the link between AIDS, as a sexually transmitted disease -(which also meant an upswing in STDs after a sustained period of decline)- has spread during a time in which there has been a growing public awareness of different cultural and sexual identities, including the gay liberation movement. As Kenneth MacKinnon puts it "the fear of AIDS can -and clearly has been- exploited in relation to notions of racial, as well as sexual purity" (1992: 161). Similarly, Watney points out that the presence of AIDS in Western blacks,

<sup>3</sup> Longtime Companion [Norman Rene, 1990] begins in the early eighties with the news of the New York Times about AIDS, as a very new issue which is talked about among gays.

drug users and gay men is “generally perceived not as accidental but as a symbolic extension of some imagined inner essence of being manifesting itself as disease” (1987: 8). He writes:

Further, in different ways for all three groups, AIDS has been used to articulate profound social fears and anxieties, in a dense web of racism, patriotism and homophobia (1987: 8).

As MacKinnon states, the awareness of AIDS is manifested in popular culture in relation to “not simply fear of the illness but fear of the associations of ‘weakness’ that the illness popular inseparability from homosexuality (and the popular conceptions of that sexuality) carries along with it” (1992: 169). Within the context of fear, it could be claimed that AIDS has been metaphorically represented in many of the contemporary horror films. In the seventies and eighties, as a growing trend in horror films, there has been the theme of the “destruction of the human body”, by means of an “alien organism” which gets into one's body and kills her/him -(in particular him). For instance, the *Alien* films -(the first one seeks to narrate the growth of a cancerous cell rather than AIDS because it was made before AIDS has become a phenomenon; but especially *Alien III* metaphorically problematizes AIDS.)-, John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982), and David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986), films about transformation and invasion of the body by an organism coming from different planets or by a small insect as a habitant of the earth, are discussed in relation to AIDS (MacKinnon, 1992: 172-180). Apart from the horror films of the eighties, films from different genres, thrillers like *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987) and *Sea of Love* (Harold Becker, 1989) are not openly, but metaphorically concerned with AIDS. *Fatal Attraction*, via the identity of a single and independent woman, indirectly manifests the fear of feminism and promotes family values. Thus the film refers to AIDS by stressing the danger of one-night stands. *Sea of Love*, as it is done in *Fatal Attraction*, “betrays a new level of anxiety about the connection of one-night stands and death” (MacKinnon, 1992: 180).

Before *Philadelphia*, films directly about AIDS came from independent cinema and television, and were made by gay directors. One such film is *Buddies* (Arthur J. Bresson, 1985). In *Buddies*, the central character, David, writes a book on AIDS, and then becomes a “buddy”. *Parting Glances* (Bill Sherwood, 1985), which is more about particular urban middle-class gay men, New York “yuppies”, deals with AIDS indirectly via one of the young characters who is dying of AIDS. Director Sherwood, who later died of AIDS himself, observes a day in the lives of a group of young gay men. *Longtime Companion* (Norman Rene, 1990), which is directly about the issue, begins in 1981, and ends in the late eighties as the crisis is expanding. The film is, again, about a group of urban middle and upper class gays, who are confronted by AIDS and must face the loss of their friends. *Longtime Companion*, which shows the solidarity between gay men, focuses on a couple but also seeks to inform the audience, partly, about the development of AIDS in the USA. *The Living End* (Gregg Araki, 1992), which is called “an irresponsible movie” by its director, depicts a relationship between two gay men, a movie critic and a hustler, both of whom are HIV positive. *The Living End*, which is dedicated to the victims of AIDS, is a passionate love story made in a nihilistic and anarchic mode and raises questions about the society, pleasure, and death within the context of gay cultures and AIDS. *Zero Patience* (John Greyson, 1993), a Canadian film about AIDS, is a recent approach to the issue made in the genre of modern musical. Another recent film on AIDS is *And the Band Played On* (Roger Spottiswoode, 1993), which comes from the mainstream and is originally made for American television. The film is adapted from Randy Shits' best seller with the same title, and deals with the political history of the epidemic. *Amazing Grace* (Amos Guttman, 1992), which shall be mentioned in the following pages, is an Israeli picture to deal with AIDS. All these films mentioned above -(except *And the Band Played On*) are made by gay directors and seek to address gay audiences. Whilst *Longtime Companion* is produced by television and distributed for the movie theaters as well, *Parting*

*Glances* and *The Living End* are made by independent producers. The characters of the films are urban middle-class gay men who are confronted with AIDS. What is common with *Buddies*, *Amazing Grace* and *Les Nuits Fauves*, which will be analyzed in the following pages, is their directors' deaths of AIDS. These films, which are all about AIDS and coming from independent cinema, have never become mainstream but it could be argued that they have already gained a cult status. On the other hand, *Philadelphia*, as a mainstream American film, which casts the stars of recent commercial Hollywood films, has become popular especially after Tom Hanks, who plays the central character of the film, won an Oscar for his performance in *Philadelphia*.

### **Philadelphia: Breaking down the stereotypes**

*Philadelphia* has been described in the media as "the first major Hollywood film with a gay rights theme" (Errigo, 1994: 25); and "the first mainstream movie about AIDS" (Green, 1994: 56). *Philadelphia* deals with AIDS and homosexuality in its social, cultural and political aspects. The way the film deals with this issue, keeps *Philadelphia* within the boundaries of realism. Raymond Williams states that realism in drama is inextricable from new social forces and the new versions of social relationships (1977-1978: 3). The new form of realism, which must be distinguished from earlier realistic scenes, has three innovations: contemporaneity, secularity and social exclusiveness (Williams, 1977-1978: 3). Williams points out that this movement, which was begun by the bourgeoisie and was not completed until the nineteenth century, is still predominant (3). He also notes that drama finally moved to television where drama includes, potentially, actually, and incomparably wider social range than any earlier medieval drama. Williams writes:

by comparison with medieval and earlier drama it has moved the popular audience out of drama as structured

occasion and into everyday access. As a social movement this the culmination of a process historically associated with realism (4).

Abercrombie, Lash and Longhurst define realism as cultural forms that must conform to a particular vision of everyday reality with a specific "high" or "popular" ontology: "To be realist a cultural form must be compatible with an ontology rooted in secular and scientific cosmology" (1993: 118). They claim that there are three main elements: 1) realism offers a window on the world; 2) realism employs a narrative which has rationally ordered connections between events and characters; 3) realism conceals authorship and disguises the production process of a text (1993: 119). Abercrombie, Lash and Longhurst have pointed out that the manifestation of the rationality of cause and effect in realist narratives, which "consist of a caused, logical flow of events, often structured into a beginning, a middle and a closed conclusion" (121). Classical novels and typical Hollywood films have such a format. Realist cultural forms seem as if they are naturally already constructed or as if they objectively report external events. Narrative, as a central organizing principle for a realist text, is made up of events that often occur individually, but connected by chains of cause and effect.

Such a tradition has been carried through to the popular fiction of the present day and most thrillers and many science fiction novels, for example, have such a structure (Abercrombie et. al, 1993: 122).

Realism, which has been the dominant cultural form for the past two hundred years, cuts across the genres of television, cinema and literature. Abercrombie, Lash and Longhurst argue that realism is the dominant form of popular culture, especially film and television, and they note a number of different types (1993: 123). Terry Lovell argues that "the connection between epistemological realism in art is at best tenuous" (1980: 64), and she points out that there is a plurality of realisms. According to Lovell, realism in art is almost as old as art itself. She writes:

From the eighteenth century onwards there have been a number of movements in various arts -the novel, painting, film, etc.- which have styled themselves as making radical departure from existing practices under this title. Yet each of these "realisms" has arisen in specific historical circumstances, and each takes its meaning as much from the practices to which it was opposed, as from practices common to all realisms (64).

Lovell notes that realism is a "signifying practice" and says, Therefore realism is necessarily identified in terms of a particular signifying practice rather than in terms of correspondence to reality. The goal of realism is an illusion. Art cannot "show things as they really are" (79).

With regard to cinematic realism, Colin MacCabe argues that "film does not reveal the real in a moment of transparency, but rather that film is constituted by a set of discourses which produce a certain reality" (1976: 11). He claims that "realism is no longer a question of an exterior reality nor of the relation of reader to text", and writes,

but one of the ways in which these two interact. The filmmaker must draw the viewer's attention to his or her relation to the screen in order to make him or her "realise" the social relations that are being portrayed (25).

*Philadelphia* is a "realistic" film that tells the story of fictional characters living in a contemporary world. The film deals with issues like AIDS, homophobia, discrimination, on which there have been debates in the media and elsewhere. *Philadelphia* is inspired by the real-life stories: the deaths from AIDS of a friend of director Jonathan Demme and screenwriter Ron Nyswaner's nephew; and news coverage about a lawyer who has AIDS. *Philadelphia* tells the struggle and the triumph of a young lawyer against the firm which fires him. Andy Beckett (Tom Hanks), who does not reveal that he is gay and has AIDS to the firm that he works for, is fired under the pretext of misplacing a crucial document and having "an attitude problem". He then sues the firm, claiming that he was fired because of AIDS. The film has

the classical narrative of popular realist fiction. The central -male- character, at a moment when everything is going well -(he is a good lawyer and is promoted to Senior Associate)- faces an obstacle: What will he do? He seeks representation from a lawyer that he knows, is initially refused due to the lawyer's prejudice against gays but finally the lawyer changes his mind. The storyline develops by the relations between Andy and his family, and his partner Miguel (Antonio Banderas), and his lawyer Joe Miller (Denzel Washington), as well. After the courtroom scenes and flashbacks related to the case, he is shown to win against the firm; but he dies immediately afterwards, and the narration closes. The central character of *Philadelphia* contracts the virus before the film begins, not at a moment within the narration. Thus, having AIDS, the disease itself is not a dramatic conflict, but causes discrimination. According to the story-line of the film, Andy's partners in the firm learn that he is gay when the lesions, which show that he has AIDS, appear on his body. Throughout the film, gayness, as an issue, is emphasized in relation to discrimination, rather than AIDS. For instance, in one of the courtroom scenes, which is one of the key scenes of the film in terms of its themes, Joe Miller asks Charles Wheeler (Jason Robards), Andy's boss, if he is a gay or not; the firm's lawyer objects the question; and everybody in the courtroom is surprised by the question; in a medium close shot we see that he gets very angry and murmurs: "how you dare it?"; Joe Miller repeats the question and Charles Wheeler says that he is not gay; then Joe Miller argues that the case is about discrimination against gays; and in a medium close shot we see Andy: he smiles and proudly looks at Joe.

The director of *Philadelphia*, Jonathan Demme (1940), is neither a mainstream director nor an outsider like Robert Altman. Demme worked as a writer for Roger Corman and then directed his first film, *Caged Heat* in 1974. He directed off beat action comedies like *Something Wild* (1986) and *Married to the Mob* (1988). He also directed television films, commercial and promotional videos. Demme won an Oscar for *The Silence of the*

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Demme tells that Joe Miller as a character was created from the idea of a head of production company, Orion: "someone (Joe Miller) who shares their (audiences') fears and prejudices but still a human being; and is homophobic and aggressively heterosexual" (Quoted from Green, 1994: 57).

*Lambs* (1991). According to Norman Miller, Demme is "one of the more acute observers of the inner life of America" and "has never been afraid to experiment with mood and subject matter in his films" (1991: 208). Demme describes his films as "a little old-fashioned, at the same time [as we try to make them] modern" (Quoted from Miller, 1991: 208). His approach and style differs from one film to another, as he sticks closer to the boundaries of popular realism in *Philadelphia*, which is not a "personal" film. Close ups, short cuts, the frequent use of point of view shots, travelling, dolly in and back, dramatic use of the nondiegetic music are the main cinematographic tools that are used by the film. In terms of point of view, for example, when Andy becomes unwell during the trial we see the people in the courtroom from a distorted angle; or during the sequence in which the lawyer, Joe Miller, comes to the hospital to visit Andy, he sees Andy, his family and friends, welcome him. It is obvious that the point of view shots are used to invite the audience to take part and a side in the fiction, to identify with the characters, and thus take the film's side in the issues presented. For instance, in the scene where the case opens, Joe Miller, in a medium close shot, comes in front of the jury and starts talking to the jury; then we cut to members of the jury and see them from Joe's point of view; in the following shot we cut to Joe, again, and we see him from the jury's point of view: he speaks to the jury, to the camera, to us, as he makes his arguments with enthusiasm, and he is impressive; meanwhile, we see the faces of members of the jury in short cuts as well. Similarly, the lawyer of the firm (Mary Steenburgen) speaks about the "facts" and argues that "Andy is looking for someone to accuse because he has AIDS", by looking towards the jury, the camera, the audience in a point of view shot.

It is obvious that Demme and Nyswaner, as creators of a mainstream film which deals with important issues, intend not to frighten the mainstream audience.<sup>4</sup> *Philadelphia*, uses the character of Joe Miller to depict an outsider's look at AIDS and homosexuality. The film, actually, deals with the question of

"how the others see the case". The first look of the outsider is the look of an older man in the firm who notices a lesion on Andy's forehead. In this scene, after Andy is promoted to Senior Associate, he has a cocktail with his partners in the office to celebrate his position; in the mid of the chat, one of his partners who speaks to Andy in a matched shot, ask him what it is in his forehead; then we cut to Andy's face and see the lesion in a detail shot from the man's point of view; Andy brushes off by saying that it is the result of a squash accident. The man keeps looking at Andy's face with curiosity and anxiety; the camera is placed behind Andy in a medium close up while a rising tension is created by a non diegetic music on the soundtrack. In another scene where Andy talks on a telephone in the hospital, we see a lesion on his nape in close up and cut to a few people looking at him. In one of the shots in the courtroom when Andy unbuttons his shirt in order to show the lesions on his chest, the camera frames the lesions in a close up and then we see different shots framing the embarrassed, irritated, sad, frightened, painful faces of the jury members and the other people in the courtroom. In the scene which Andy makes up his face with his friends, he goes to the toilet with a sudden pain and his friends look behind him with an anxious and hopeless look. In the last sequence when all the family is in the hospital for Andy, all the members go to bed to see and speak to Andy and bid farewell.

In the casting of *Philadelphia*, it is clear that the film is an attempt at "legitimation". Tom Hanks, who stars as romantic or adolescent characters mostly in family entertainments such as *Splash* (1984), *The Man With One Red Shoe* (1985), *The Money Pit* (1985), *Big* (1988), *Turner and Hooch* (1988), *Joe Versus the Volcano* (1990), *Sleepless in Seattle* (1992), is in the role of a successful, mannered, and refined young lawyer, a kind of "yuppie". Andy, as a gay character, is tolerant of his office partners' macho jokes, and is just like a close friend to his partner Miguel.

*Philadelphia*, by the same token is a film about stereotypes that breaks down the stereotypes and creates its "ideal"

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In *Parting Glances* and *Longtime Companion*, the plots take place within a gay community that does not interact very much with "others".

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About the typication of gays, see Richard Dyer's crucial essay: "Seen to be believed: Some problems in the representation of gay people as typical" in *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations*, (London: Routledge, 1993: 19-52).

stereotypes. *Philadelphia*, as a mainstream film, has positive stereotypes of gays, and develops a story-line in which the gay characters are supported in moral by a friendly environment, except the firm which fired Andy.<sup>5</sup> Richard Dyer points out that the word "stereotype" is today almost always a term of abuse, and in recent years blacks, women and gays have objected to the way in which they find themselves stereotyped in the mass media and in everyday speech (1993: 11). According to Richard Dyer, "the effectiveness of stereotypes resides in the way they invoke a consensus". He writes:

The stereotype is taken to express a general agreement about a social group, as if that agreement arose before, and independently of the stereotype. Yet for the most part it is from stereotypes that we get our ideas about social groups (14).

In *Philadelphia*, at the beginning, Joe Miller is described as a heterosexual whose attitudes to gays and his knowledge about AIDS are affected by the stereotypes. Initially Joe refuses the case; after Andy's visit to his office, he goes to his doctor because of his fear of AIDS; he participates in anti-gay jokes in his regular bar; and then he gets very angry at a black young man who tries to pick him up in a chemist. On the other hand, in relation to stereotypes, there is a scene in which Andy and his partners rest in a racquet club where the older men joke about gays. T. E. Perkins states that stereotypes are both simple and complex, and that they are the prototypes of "shared cultural meanings" (1979: 141). There are pejorative and positive stereotypes. In *Philadelphia*, the portraits of gays are constructed via the characters of Andy and his partner Miguel, who is a Hispanic. It can be argued that both gay characters of *Philadelphia*, *Longtime Companion* and *Parting Glances* are comparable in terms of culture and class. However, *Philadelphia* involves an inter-ethnic couple. One can raise a question whether those films stereotype gayness and AIDS by confining such issues to upper class white men.<sup>6</sup> The transformation of the homophobic lawyer in a positive way, and the understanding

and support of Andy's family are a sort of positive stereotyping as well. *Philadelphia* recreates an idealized environment, which does not mean this never happens in real life. As Andrew Sullivan points out, "the movie also portrayed a homosexual emphatically as a member of a heterosexual family" (1994: 42).

In *Philadelphia*, apart from the two gay characters who are defined positively, many of the other characters are positive in terms of their attitudes to the gayness. For instance, almost all the members of Andy's "large" family are very sensitive to what happens to Andy. In a scene where the members of the family, including Andy and his lover Miguel, come together for the parents' fortieth wedding anniversary celebrations, Andy tells his family that he is going to sue the firm. Everybody offers him moral support and the atmosphere is one of understanding and respect. In another scene, Joe Miller's wife Lisa (Lisa Summerour) accuses him of homophobia. Finally, the trial opens with gay rights demonstrations. As Perkins puts it, "it is the ideology itself that has to be constantly recreated and redefined" (1979: 137). She points out that the positive stereotypes are an important part of the ideology and are important in the socialization of both dominant and oppressed groups. She writes:

In order to focus attention on the ideological nature of stereotypes it might be much more useful to talk of pejorative stereotypes and laudatory stereotypes, rather than to conceal the 'pejorativeness' in the meaning of the term (144).

If we continue with stereotypes, *Philadelphia*, as "positive" film in terms of oppressed social groups, is in solidarity with people living with AIDS. For the mainstream cinema, representations of pain, death, sorrow and illness are not usually considered to be commercial -(with the notable exception of some melodramas such as *Terms of Endearment*)-. Death is often represented by horror and violence via the genres of adventure, horror, western, science-fiction, and so on, which have been analysed well by feminist theory and psychoanalytic

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"AIDS in the United States has become increasingly a disease of the urban poor, particularly blacks and hispanics." (Sontag, 1990: 160).

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Let us remember the final sequence of *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978). In this partly ironic finale, one of the gathering moments in the film, the community sings the American national song. Tom Hanks' speech at Oscar night might be a good example of a similar intention: Hanks, after his long and sentimental talk in which he tried to nationalize the issues of *Philadelphia*, said "God Bless America!"

film theory. In this respect, the narrative of *Philadelphia*, as Amy Taubin points out, "is less about being gay and living with AIDS than about being heterosexual and homophobic" (1994: 24).

Susan Sontag argues that tuberculosis and cancer, as two myths, are, or have been, understood as diseases of passion. *Love Story* (Arthur Hiller, 1970) idealizes this passion. At the end of the film when Ali McGraw dies of cancer, Ryan O'Neal's father, in front of the hospital says to his son: "Love means never having to say you're sorry". But as Susan Sontag notes, AIDS marks as a turning point in terms of illness, medicine and sexuality. Because AIDS was known as "gay cancer" for a time, the main victims of the illness have been "pariah groups".<sup>7</sup> While cases related to AIDS have increased, it has become a national disaster, like an earthquake or war.

Talk in the United States (and not only in the United States), is of a national emergency, "possibly our national survival" (Sontag, 1990: 160).

The last sequence of *Philadelphia* portrays a solidarity against this national disaster. After his death, Andy's family and friends come together and they are framed by the slow movements of the camera: Andy's parents, relatives, his partner Miguel, his parents, patients having AIDS, lawyer Joe Miller and his wife, children, old people, young people, blacks, whites, heterosexuals, gays, even homophobic are together. Everybody seems sorrowful but strong and mature. Tomorrow is a brand new day and the belief that America will defeat this disaster is declared by emphasizing the community.<sup>8</sup> It is arguable that the stress on community and nation is internalised in the film via *Philadelphia*, the city that story takes place in, and the title of the film. Since its foundation in 1681, until the twentieth century, *Philadelphia*, which played a central role during the American and Industrial Revolutions, has always been an economic and intellectual center. The film starts with the short cuts of the inhabitants of *Philadelphia*. Bruce Springsteen's song, dedicated to *Philadelphia*, accompanies the credit titles of the

film. Springsteen sings: "City of brotherly love, place I call home; don't turn your back on me, I don't want to be alone". Springsteen's voice and words superimposes the people and places of *Philadelphia*: navigators, firemen, restaurants, markets, blacks, whites, children, homeless...<sup>9</sup> Stress on community in Hollywood films, which depend on the individual and his -(not-usually-her) achievement, might be one of the main reasons that they are popular both in North America and abroad.

### *Les Nuits Fauves*: A youth film

While *Philadelphia* is one example of the recent films of Hollywood as a national and international cinema, *Les Nuits Fauves*, a film dealing with AIDS and broader issues, is a typical example of French cinema as a national cinema. *Les Nuits Fauves* is the first and last film of Cyrill Collard who died of AIDS.<sup>10</sup> Collard was recognized by the Cesars three days after his death on March 5, 1993.<sup>11</sup> *Les Nuits Fauves*, adapted by Collard and Jacques Fieschi from Collard's bestselling semi-autobiographical novel with the same title is very clearly a "personal" film, almost autobiographical.<sup>12</sup> Its difference from *Philadelphia* comes not only from its approach and style, but also from the representation of its central character, Jean -(played by Collard)-, who is a bisexual man.<sup>13</sup> There is the rationality of cause and effect throughout the narrative which has a beginning, a middle and an end. The plot is as simple as the formula of "boy meets girl". Boy meets girl, a kind of relationship with passion develops, and boy meets another boy. The conflict of the film is the other lover or the bisexuality rather than AIDS.

*Les Nuits Fauves* is the story of Jean, who is a photographer. He goes to Morocco and discovers that he is HIV positive; than meets Laura (Romane Bohringer) during an audition for a commercial. They are attracted to each other; Jean, at the same time, has a relationship with Sammy (Carlos Lopez), a young member of a Spanish immigrant family. Jean tells Laura that he

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Amy Taubin explains the context between *Philadelphia* and the film's theme in relation to the democracy and equality. She writes: "Set in the 'city of brotherly love', and the 'cradle of American democracy', *Philadelphia* takes the courtroom as its main arena." The principles invoked there are set down in the constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Declaration of Independence: "That all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights: that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." (25).

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Cyrill Collard, writer, songwriter and a director, was born in 1957. He wrote two novels. *Les Nuits Fauves*, the latest one was adapted to cinema by Collard himself.

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As mentioned above, *Amazing Grace* is another film which shares the same destiny as *Les Nuits Fauves*, and will be remembered as in a similar way to Collard's film. Amos Guttman, director of the film, died of AIDS, at the age of 38 in Tel Aviv, while his film (*Amazing Grace*) was shown in Berlin Film Festival in 1992. *Amazing Grace*, which is made on a small budget, deals with AIDS although never calls it by its real name. It could be argued that *Amazing Grace* is one of the most impressive films on desperation and death.



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Collard, as a French anti-hero, is at the centre of a debate which has been continuing since his death. Recently, writer Suzanne Prou revealed that her 25-year-old granddaughter, Erica, had died of AIDS, and it was claimed by the former minister of culture Françoise Giroud that it was Collard who had infected Erica (Theobald, 1992: 4).

13

It is interesting that in another French film, *Mensonge* (François Margolin, 1992), which is also about AIDS, the victim is a bisexual, married man. He passes the virus to his wife. When she learns that she has AIDS, she tries to find out her husband's female lover(s), but discovers that he has a male partner with AIDS.

is HIV positive. Laura is angry with him, but in fact is jealous of his relationship with Sammy. At the end they are all separated from each other: Sammy joins a racist gang, Laura goes to another men and Jean travels in Europe during the last days of his life.

*Les Nuits Fauves* starts with the internal monologue of Jean, and he, as a first-person-voice-over commentator, intervenes for some time. The feeling of improvisation comes from dialogues and camera movements which frame characters as real people in their daily lives. For instance, in the opening scene of the film, in Morocco, Jean stops his car in front of the camera; Jean and his friend Kader (Alissa Jabri) get off the car; the camera pans left to frame Jean, the photographs on the back seat of the car, and finally Kader; it pans rapidly right to Jean holding a video camera; and then we see what the camera sees from Jean's point of view. In another scene, where Jean, Kader and Olivier (Olivier Chavarot) argue in front of a square in Paris, the camera moves around them; the camera initially frames them in a long shot and then in a close up while they speak interruptedly to each other. In the scene where Laura comes for an audition to Joan's and Kader's place, she answers their questions, while Jean frames her by the camera. In this scene, Jean stands at the window and watches Paris; the frame is illuminated by the subdued colour of daylight coming through the window; in a close up, Jean turns his head when the noise of the closing door is heard off screen; we cut to Laura first in a close up; and then the camera is placed behind Laura and frames her, Kader and Jean in a long shot in the large studio which is almost empty; while Kader talks to Laura, Jean comes to their sides, and then sets the lights; Kader asks her to improvise while shooting and says: "I'll give you the clue. The theme is jealousy"; Jean zooms to Laura's eyes by video-camera, and then frames her face; in short cuts, we see Jean and Laura in close-ups; the scene is dominated by a subdued light. On the scenes where Jean uses a video-camera, action is framed through the viewfinder of video-camera in black and white, from his point of view. Jean uses

video as if aiming to capture life like the way *Les Nuits Fauves* appears to do so. In the two scenes just mentioned above and the scene in which Jean confesses to Laura that he has AIDS, in his flat in a medium close shot and after in a close-up, the dialogues have an emotional and improvised feel. What is interesting about this scene is the lighting, which, as Collard's preference, is dominant in many of the sequences throughout the film as well. All the scene is shot in front of the window of Jean's flat. In the scene, Laura and Jean stand opposite each other in front of the window; we see the dusky evening with a pinkish sky with clouds, and the lights of Paris; there is an artificial lighting which appears on the faces of Laura and Jean. The feeling of improvisation is valid for the scene in which a drunk drag queen sings in a gay bar. In the scene, the camera frames the drag queen and Jean in a close up and pans left to frame young people on the bar; then it pans right to frame again the queen and Jean; the drag queen argues about "reality" and starts singing; his yellow blouse contrasts with the dimmish, subdued lights of the bar. Location shooting, long takes, and acting style, inspired by improvisation, are hints of the sources that affected Collard's cinema. As an apprentice of Maurice Pialat, Collard did his film in the style of cinéma-vérité. Pialat, who "combines a quasi-cinéma-vérité approach with the reworking of deeply personal matters, [he] uses improvisation and hand-held camerawork in his films. His cinema is still within a realistic idiom, fusing the New Wave (and neo-realist) concern with location shooting and contemporary setting with the 'intimate' realism of the central European cinema of the 1960s." (Vincendeau, 1991: 651).

Cinéma-vérité is a style of filmmaking that depends on the idea of capturing truth on film by observing, recording and presenting reality without exercising directorial control on it (Katz, 1982: 240). Cinéma-vérité could be traced back to Dziga Vertov, who advocated and practiced filmmaking using real people and actual events (Katz, 1982: 240). One of the people that Collard dedicated his film to, along with Thierry Ravel, is

Lino Brocka (1940), a Filipino gay director, who shoots film, as he says, "to make people angry" (Ciment, 1991: 99). His films, "often set in the slums or the poor districts of Manila, borrow from several sources: Italian neo-realism, the Spanish melodrama and the American film noir of Kazan and Dassin" (Ciment, 1991: 99). In Brocka's films, "the realistic approach is enhanced by a larger-than-life theatricality" and "brutality is accompanied by sudden outbursts of lyricism" (Ciment, 1991: 99). It could be argued that in certain points there are obvious similarities between the approaches of Collard and Brocka.

It could be claimed that, *Les Nuits Fauves*, has much to do with the films of young filmmakers such as Jean Jacques Beineix, Leos Carax and Luc Besson, who have been labelled the members of "New French New Wave". This "new wave" has a postmodern approach and is called "cinema du look". The films of Beineix, especially *Betty Blue* (1985), Besson's *Subway* (1985) and *Nikita* (1989), Carax's *Les Amants du Pont Neuf* (1991) are youth films. The young characters of these films are restless anti-heroines -(for example *Betty Blue* and *Nikita*)-, always looking for something new. *Diva's* (Jean Jacques Beineix, 1980) young postman rides his motorcycle to go anywhere; *Le Grand Bleu's* (Luc Besson, 1989) driver looks for excitement and adventure in the deep of the sea; *Betty Blue's* Betty is depressed when she is not able to "move". All these characters, in a world of mobility, are "homeless" people, in a sense, who run after their own images; and immobility is equivalent to death in their subconscious. Douglas Kellner points out that the concept of identity in postmodern theory is more and more unstable and fragile (1993: 143). He notes that "the recent discovery of postmodernity problematizes the very notion of identity, claiming that it is a myth and illusion" (143). For *Les Nuits Fauves'* Jean, it is obvious that identity is just like an illusion: he knows that now or then, but not when he grows old, he is going to die; thus, mobility becomes a drug for him. The film opens in Morocco where he walks around with his camera. He says: "I feel I go through life like an American tourist doing as many

towns as possible. Sagittarians always want to be elsewhere." His relationship both with Laura and Samy; his style of driving his car fast; his cruising around dark places are the results of his need to be more and more excited. The camera -(both of film and the video within the film)- moves rapidly trying to bear witness to the last days of Jean, as if it is 'observing, recording and presenting' his reality.

*Les Nuits Fauves* connects with another tradition, which has been a convenient theme for the New French New Wave as well: "L'amour fou". Beineix's *Betty Blue* is a frantic love story; Besson's wild *Nikita* renounces everything when she meets the man of her life; the lovers of *Les Amants du Pont Neuf* are not more than "postmodern l'amour fou characters". In Collard's film, AIDS becomes an ideal reason for l'amour fou. After Jean says that he has AIDS, Laura loves him more than ever. Even death would not be able to separate them: AIDS turns into a tool to stress passion; makes it even more "romantic".<sup>14</sup> For instance, in one of the scenes where Jean and Laura make love, Laura tells her lover not to wear a condom, even though she knows he has AIDS; and in one of the last scenes Laura says to Jean: "At the point, I really thought I was HIV positive. I wanted to share everything. All's fair in love and war." AIDS becomes a romantic metaphor for Jean, although he never internalises it: "I don't know how to explain... It's as if... it isn't part of me. I can't take it in", says Jean to Laura, when she gets very angry at him after he tells her that he is HIV positive. As Sontag points out, "the romantic treatment of death asserts that people were made singular, made more interesting". She emphasizes the nihilistic and sentimental idea of "the interesting" (1990: 31).

But more than that, Jean sees AIDS and death as part of life, as natural as life itself. In a scene of the last sequence of *Les Nuits Fauves*, where Jean travels to the "edge of Europe", as he says, by his car, he leans to a parapet and looks at everything that moves, everything that lives; from his point of view, the camera zooms in on a ship sailing down, a train passes through at speed, and

14

Suzanna Prou, whose granddaughter died of AIDS, as mentioned before, says that she is against the French tendency to romanticise the disease: "I'm against the idea that death should be an extension of love." (Quoted from Theobald, 1992: 4).

In relation to community awareness and neglectfulness the need for safer sex, Simon Watney criticizes Collard's film. He samples *Buddies*, *Parting Glances* and *Longtime Companion* as 'honorable semi-didactic AIDS-films' and says: "*Les Nuits Fauves* illustrates the extent to which French homosexuals and French homosexual culture is unable to understand; let alone articulate, its (AIDS) terrible predicament." (1993: 25). On the other hand, Mark Nash, who says that he is surprised about the gay critical reaction against *Les Nuits Fauves*, rightly puts it that the film is treated as reality, not representation; and he quotes Collard's comment about his film: "my film is not didactic. It's not an advertisement for the Ministry of Health!" Nash, who does not agree with Simon Watney's approach in some points, finds *Les Nuits Fauves* as an interesting film in terms of Collard's performance, and work with his own body; and Jean, as a contemporary character, who is confused between demand and desire (1994: 97-105).

a crane moves toward a ship on the port. In the following shots, we cut to the sea, the naked bodies of the young construction workers; the sun sets when Jean looks at the sea in a close-up; we cut to the lighthouse and then to the sea, from his point of view; Jean still looks at the sea when the sun rises; and by an internal diegetic sound, in voice over, he says: "I'm alive. The world isn't just something that goes on around me. I'm a part of it. It's gift to me. Perhaps I'll die of AIDS, but it's no longer my life". The camera in a crane shot frames Jean in front of a gulf nearby the sea; then in a tracking shot, the camera turns to the sea; a nondiegetic music rises while we dissolve to the last credits which appear on the image of a sky, particularly in the colours of a sunset with moving clouds... Through this approach AIDS becomes ordinary and does not exist as a metaphor anymore. As Amanda Lipman notes, "instead of trying to make meaning of the virus, the film looks sideways at its connection with Jean's own sense of denial and acceptance; the move from his initial impulse, even once he has the virus, that nothing will happen to him" (1993: 62). She writes:

What is important about the final scene is that it links HIV with life rather than death. Unlike Laura's tantrums or Samy's grim self-destruction, it touches on how something positive can come from suffering, while refraining from the idea that sick people have recourse to only to spiritualism (62).

Another aspect of *Les Nuits Fauves* is its approach to cultural identities. The film metaphorically questions the possibilities of different identities living together. When Jean threatens the leader of the racist skinhead gang with his infected blood he protects the Arab boy by his "blood". In this scene, Jean goes to find Samy with Samy's brother; Samy and his racist friends take an Arab from a bar, and hit him at a dark corner; Jean threatens the leader of the racist skinhead gang by his infected blood by cutting his own hand with a knife and letting drip his blood on the leader's breast; then the gang let Arab go; thus, Jean protects the Arab by his 'blood' while dim blue lights

of the street lamps fall upon his face and his hand; he, then, leaves by his car while Samy and his brother walk together in a frame which Jean's car on a bridge and they are on the sidewalk under the blue, dim lights of the lamps and in the dark of the night: The film is consisted on the conflict of two feelings, sadness and -(most of the time)- joy, which are emphasized by the lighting and colours as well: the contrast between bright and vivid yellow of the sun and the pastel shades of pink and yellow of the sunset; similarly, there is the contrast of day and night, in which many of the scenes of *Les Nuits Fauves* are shot. The light of the neons and street lamps, dark cruising places, lighting of the interiors such as houses, restaurants, bars and discos all collaborate to the mode of film in general. In the film, Paris, in a sense, with its cafes and bars in which marginal, different people come together, is represented as a multicultural, a multinational city in which the 'others' live as well.<sup>15</sup> Collard brings together different identities through his own identity. Thus, gayness, but AIDS as well, provokes the solidarity between different identities.<sup>16</sup> The song which Cyril Collard writes and sings in the film, *Someone*, is interesting in its lyrics, which stress the themes of Europe and the world: "Somewhere in Europe, someone is waiting for me; somewhere in the world, someone is looking for me." While *Philadelphia* talks about 'brotherly city' and the USA, *Les Nuits Fauves* turns its face to Europe and conceptualises it, and AIDS as well, with different identities; as a result, from the point of view of the film, AIDS appears as a global issue. As Ian Ang rightly points out, 'Europe's hope for cultural renewal can paradoxically only come from those "others" who came to Europe precisely as a result of colonialism.' (29, 30).

## Conclusion

*Les Nuits Fauves*, as a film based on a true story, uses the techniques of cinéma-vérité and tells the stories of young people; also, as a hybrid cultural product, it traces the thematic

### 15

Jean's partner Samy, and his schoolmate Kader, and the Arabs, and even Laura's family are immigrants. Laura's mother is from Algeria and meets her father, who came from a big family of Spanish republicans, in Marseilles. In addition, the film begins in Morocco and ends in Portugal.

### 16

One could argue that, in *Philadelphia*, a black woman as a witness tells an anecdote about her "African-American earrings", referring to racial discrimination in Andy's firm.

17

"Les Nuits Fauves belong to what could almost be called a genre for French beginners: the triangular, or, dual love story set in realistic locations and told a bitter-sweet, most often bleak tone." (Ciment, 1994: 160).

traditions of French cinema, like l'amour fou and the problematic of triangular relation.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, *Philadelphia* is a popular realist picture, partly made in the tradition of the courtroom genre. Both *Philadelphia* and *Les Nuits Fauves* deal with AIDS. While *Philadelphia* problematizes AIDS socially, in terms of discrimination and places it as a national disaster, which could be defeated by solidarity and understanding, *Les Nuits Fauves* takes the issue in a more global way, not much problematizes socially, rather as a way of discrimination. *Philadelphia* and *Les Nuits Fauves* are two different approaches to AIDS coming from different national cinemas. Both films manifest their claims by means of the city, *Philadelphia* and Paris, and their inhabitants of different identities. Homi K. Bhabha argues that the cultural difference marks the establishment of new forms of meaning and strategies of identification, through processes of negotiation (1993: 313). He writes:

it is to the city that the migrants, the diasporic come to change the history of the nation. If I have suggested that the people emerge in the finitude of the nation, making the liminality of cultural identity, producing the double-edged discourse of social territories and temporalities, then in the west, and increasingly elsewhere, it is the city which provides the space in which emergent identifications and new social movements of the people are played out. It is there that, in our time, the perplexity of the living is most acutely experienced (319-320).

*Philadelphia* and *Les Nuits Fauves*, both, succeed in reminding as of the "perplexity of the living" that takes place in the city. *Philadelphia*, as a popular film coming from the mainstream American cinema, focuses on homophobia and discrimination, rather than directly on AIDS. In *Philadelphia*, AIDS is taken as a starting point, which refers to homosexuality that develops the story with particular reference to homophobia and discrimination, which are the main issues of the film. *Philadelphia*, different from many of the other mainstream films, succeeds to break down the stereotypes; and as a popular realist

film, conceptualizes AIDS as a national disaster and offers a solidarity. On the other hand, *Les Nuits Fauves*, which became a cult film, conceptualizes AIDS metaphorically as a global issue; and takes AIDS and death as part of life, as natural as life itself. *Les Nuits Fauves*, as an auteur film, which does not problematize the issues like gayness, discrimination and bisexuality, develops the feelings of sadness and joy, together.

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## Gönderen: Bağımsız Hollywood Sineması

### Özet

Bu makalede Bağımsız-Hollywood sineması olarak adlandırılan filmlerin son dönem Türk Sineması üzerindeki etkileri incelenmektedir. Bu çerçevede benzerlikler ve farklılıklar tespit edilerek, Türk sinemasının gelişimindeki farklılıklar belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Hollywood, global kültürün bir parçası olarak tüm ulusal kültürlerle sızmakta, Türk sineması da bu etkilenebilirliğe dahil olmaktadır. Son dönem Türk sinemasında bu etkilenebilirlik, yalnızca popüler filmler üzerinde değil, sanat filmi biçimlerinde de görülmektedir. Öte yandan etkilenebilirlik kadar yenilenmeden de bahsedilebilir. Eski ve yeni Türk filmleri arasında konu seçimleri ve anlatım biçimleri açısından bir farklılık görülmektedir. Yeni Türk filmleri popüler sinema ile sanat sineması arasında bir anlatım diline sahiptirler ve ticari sinemaya yaklaşma arzusu taşımaktadırlar.

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### From: Independent-Hollywood Cinema

#### Abstract

This article attempts to display the influence of independent-Hollywood cinema on contemporary Turkish cinema. In this context their similarities and differences are examined focusing on the basic trends in the development of Turkish cinema. Hollywood, as a part of the global culture, infiltrates into all national cultures as is the case for Turkish cinema. Hollywood's influence on contemporary Turkish cinema can be observed not only over the popular films but on various forms of art films as well. On the other hand this influence sometimes takes the form of a renewal. There is a difference between old and new Turkish films in their choice of subjects and in their forms of expression. New Turkish films' language stands inbetween popular and art cinema, displaying a desire to come closer to the commercial cinema.