

The Channel 4 Years: Working with Stuart Marshall, a conversation between Rebecca Dobbs and Caroline Spry

This exchange reflects on the broadcast work of Stuart Marshall and takes the form of a conversation between Rebecca Dobbs and Caroline Spry. Rebecca Dobbs (RD) was Marshall's producer for his television programmes from 1987 to 1994 through her production company, Maya Vision. Caroline Spry (CS) was a commissioning editor at Channel 4, from 1985 to 1995, in the Independent Film and Video Department (IFVD), which commissioned his broadcast work.

Caroline Spry (CS): I first met Stuart in 1987 to discuss his programme ideas for Channel 4 (C4), where I was working as a commissioning editor in the Independent Film & Television Department, alongside Alan Fountain and Rod Stoneman. The meeting was the start of a very productive working relationship with Stuart, which lasted until his death in 1993 when he contracted an AIDS-related illness while in the United States developing a new programme for us: a personal plea for patient choice and the expansion of alternative medical options for people with AIDS.

Rebecca Dobbs (RD): Stuart Marshall first walked into Maya Vision that same year to interview me as a potential producer. He had seen a film I had produced for Channel 4 in South Africa under apartheid, (*Simon Ngubane Still on Strike*, Dir Melanie Chait 1989) ('film' is used as a generic term reflecting the most common format used within independent production at the time) and had done his homework on previous people I had worked with from Steven Dwoskin to David Bowie—I liked him immediately. He was an artist and composer, video artist, teacher and filmmaker. He had studied fine art at Hornsey and Newport College of Art, followed by an MA in new musical composition at Wesleyan University in the States, where he studied with composer Alvin Lucier. Stuart subsequently taught at Newcastle Polytechnic, the Royal College of Art and Chelsea School of Art. We talked for hours—politics, music, psychoanalysis, art—I don't remember him asking anything practical about what I could do to help him or how we would work together, but we did talk about the ideas behind a programme he was thinking about. He wanted to look at the birth of German constructs around sexuality, ideas that were adopted and perverted under the Nazis. Stuart didn't just want to bear witness to that period of history on behalf of lesbians and gay men, but try to reach back to the source and track the development of the ideas that led to such a brutal cataclysm.

Stuart was rooted in a rich matrix of art and politics; music and psychoanalysis; theory and practice. He worked with the London Filmmakers Co-op and co-founded London Video Arts (LVA) in 1976; he created music/sound, video, theatrical events and installations in the United States, Europe and the United Kingdom throughout the 1970s

and early 1980s (see, CV included in the dossier). Through his teaching, writing and moving image work he sought to refocus, disrupt and challenge established narratives. I think he saw himself as part of two independent video communities; he was an artist and a political activist using the tools at his disposal. Television before Channel 4 had no attraction for Stuart and in its turn the BBC and ITV would probably not have entertained a Stuart Marshall programme.

CS: In order to understand Stuart's relationship to television in the 1980s and 1990s, and indeed how it was possible for him to have one, you need to put it in the context of both the development of C4 and of the independent production sector in the United Kingdom. You can in many ways see this as a post-1968 phenomenon, the bow wave of which rippled on into the 1970s and the spread of dynamic movements for change: civil rights, women's and gay liberation, the peace movement, third-world struggles for nationhood and workers' self-determination. Stuart's early introduction to activism came in 1968. He was studying the Foundation Course at Hornsey College of Art, when a 1-day student strike turned into a 6-week sit in. Stuart threw himself into the protest, which demanded sweeping changes to the college regime and to art and design education in general.

The 1970s saw the flourishing of a vibrant independent film and video production sector spawning a plethora of production cooperatives and workshops as well as alternative exhibition and distribution networks. London Video Arts, which Stuart co-founded in 1976, was part of this movement.

RD: Experimental film was thriving and also had its own ecosystem, complete with sources of funding, exhibition and distribution—and, importantly, an alternative mode of practice—a very different way of making moving-image work from the established modes of the film or the TV industry, which were hierarchical and uni-skill based. Often the practitioners were graduates from, or teachers at, art colleges; multiple craft skills were acquired, shared and valued and inventiveness made up for lack of funds. Then, in the mid-1970s, nearly a decade after the introduction of the Sony Portapak in the United States, both artists and political activists in the United Kingdom began working with video and JVC and Sony augmented the Bolex, the Beaulieu, the double-headed pic sync and the optical printer. Writing 10 years later, Stuart identified the two communities as being 'separated by major ideological differences' but he also suggested that, 'In Britain this gap is now beginning to close as community video workers increasingly question dominant televisual forms' (1984).

CS: In the midst of all of this in 1971, a campaign was started by a number of individuals and groups who were concerned about the future of broadcasting in the United Kingdom and wanted to see a fourth channel established to extend the range of programmes produced and voices heard. The campaigners included media critics, disaffected TV producers, MPs, media pressure groups and journalists. From 1974, the Independent Filmmakers Association, with its commitment to the twin goals of artistic innovation and social critique, became the representative voice of oppositional practices within the campaign.

The notion of opposition was extremely important. The work of many of the evolving filmmaking practices of the 1970s were positioned in opposition to the industry practices of the time. This was particularly true of those seeking to intervene in the most culturally pervasive of the media – television – where the films and videos they produced found almost no screen time. I think Stuart’s development as an artist and video maker during these years was formed against this backdrop of a non-vanguardist approach that aimed at reaching a larger audience.

RD: It is true that television was not at all interested in independent programme makers (with a few notable exceptions like ZDF in Germany and SVT2 in Sweden). Stuart mentioned ‘Open Door’ on the BBC and ‘Look Here’ for London Weekend Television (LWT) as the first steps in a reactive technology, enabling some community groups access to TV, but in reality it simply amounted to them being filmed by the broadcaster’s professional crews and allowing a small amount of ‘non broadcast standard’ material supplied by those groups, to be included in the package. In other words, community activism was seen through the lens of the broadcasting establishment and the idea that independent film and video makers could frame their own narrative and make their own programmes had not yet gained any traction. Still, their work did get screen time at film festivals worldwide, in arts centres like the Arnolfini in Bristol or 2B Butlers Wharf in London, independent cinema clubs at universities, in museums and art galleries like The Hayward Gallery with their *Film as Film* exhibition and in some independent cinemas like the Scala in Charlotte Street that later became the first C4 building. There were distribution chains, too, like London Video Arts in the United Kingdom and V-Tape in Canada, both of which worked with Stuart. And funding came from the Arts Council’s Film and Video Panel, the BFI, galleries, etc.

CS: The campaigning work of those who saw themselves as part of independent film culture had a significant impact on the shape of the channel that emerged in 1982. An essential part of the innovative remit that was given to C4 in the Broadcasting Act 1980 was to provide a distinctive service including programmes that would appeal to tastes and interests not generally catered for by the existing channels. It also called for innovation and experiment in the form and content of those programmes. It was these requirements, together with a shift in the development and production of films and programmes to independently controlled production entities that enabled what had been oppositional practices outside the broadcasting institutions to intervene and challenge from within mainstream television. The establishment of IFVD was intrinsic to this development. The first Chief Executive, Jeremy Isaacs, actively encouraged a progressive interpretation of C4’s remit. Our department set out to bring new voices, new forms and new areas of subject matter to our screens, looking to independent and oppositional filmmakers both in the United Kingdom and internationally to help us achieve that. C4 and particularly our department emerged as a home to difference and dissidence, challenging audiences and the established processes of television with work that, ironically, brought the radicalism kindled in the late 1960s into the broadcasting of the Thatcher period.

Many Conservative legislators felt their support for the new Channel had been betrayed by the ambiguous permissiveness of its remit. As Isaacs noted, Norman Tebbit

complained that he had ‘got it all wrong . . . “doing all these programmes for homosexuals and such.” (We’d only done one, actually.) “Parliament never meant that sort of thing . . . Golf and sailing and fishing. Hobbies. That’s what we intended”’ (1989: 65).

Programmes shown as part of IFVD’s schedule were progressively oppositional in content, form and process, challenging the government’s neo-liberal and socially conservative values. As well as dealing with the Troubles in Northern Ireland and sexuality, our programmes included polemical films on issues such as nuclear policy, Poland, the welfare state and the role of the police. These often ignored the conventions of balance at the heart of conventional current affairs and documentaries.

Formal experimentation was explored in screenings of avant-garde filmmakers, seasons of new video and Super 8. Those engaging directly with television through new commissions were also supported in their experimental approach, resulting in programmes such as the ‘Pictures of Women’ series (1984), *Nicaragua* (1985) and *Handsworth Songs* (1986).

IFVD was also one of the main funders of the film and video workshop movement in Britain. Born in the 1960s with groups such as Amber Films in Newcastle and Cinema Action in London, and extending into the 1970s and 1980s with Sankofa, Black Audio Collective, Sheffield Women’s Film Co-op, VET and Four Corners, these workshops developed a range of production, training, exhibition and outreach activities which challenged the existing industry models.

RD: It was exactly because form and content could be both innovative and challenging, and that C4 had an explicit mandate to give space and time to voices that would not be heard on mainstream television, that Stuart moved towards producing works for television. But non-industry working practices were also key and huge credit has to go to C4, Jeremy Isaacs, Alan Fountain, Rod Stoneman and you, Caroline, as well as the IFVD legal and business teams at C4, all of whom were engaged in an active, positive and thoughtful interpretation of the C4 remit. If they liked the proposal they backed filmmakers to make the films they wanted to make. It seems inconceivable these days, but they created the space and allowed ideas to come up from the grass roots, so a much wider and more diverse range of films had airtime. There was time, creative interaction and a genuine sense of everyone working together for the film.

CS: IFVD had two strands in its early years. The main one of which was the ‘Eleventh Hour’, occupying a slot from 11 pm on Monday evenings, late but often open-ended. The slot provided a showcase for the best independent film and video making; innovative work which aimed ‘to complement the existing networks and to enable large numbers of viewers to experience images and voices hitherto unseen and unheard’ (Fountain, 1987). This ranged from feature films and documentaries from all corners of the world to an engagement with formal experiment and minority communities. It also enabled polemical programmes to be produced: ‘balance’ and ‘objectivity’ were abandoned in favour of viewpoint and sets of beliefs. For the first time on British television, there was a commitment to working with experimental film and video artists including Stuart, whose programme *Bright Eyes* was commissioned for the ‘Eleventh Hour’ in 1984.

RD: *Bright Eyes* was one of the first full-length documentary about AIDS shown anywhere in the world and, along with Stuart's now lost *Kaposi's Sarcoma* (1983), was a very early documentary made by a cultural activist in response to the AIDS crisis. In *Bright Eyes*, Stuart looked at the relationship between the mass media, scientific systems of classification and definitions of pathology; it placed the AIDS crisis within the context of the historical persecution of homosexuals.

CS: From the early days of C4, there were demands from within the lesbian and gay communities (I am using 'gay' and 'lesbian' rather than more current language such as LGBTQ, queer, etc. as this reflects the terms of the debate at that time) for access to the airwaves. This came in the form of calls for more positive representation across the broad span of the schedule and also for specific gay slots. High-profile campaigns targeted all four national broadcasters (BBC 1, BBC 2, ITV and Channel 4). One such campaign was *Are We Being Served: Lesbians, Gays and Broadcasting* (see Trenchard, Finch and Cairncross, 1987). A research project undertaken between 1985 and 1987, it found that gay representation was extremely low and overwhelmingly negative. It proved a significant tool in persuading C4 to seriously consider the gay and lesbian audience. This was reinforced by individual calls for C4 to specifically fulfil its remit to cater for hidden voices. One such call came from Peter Tatchell who wrote in *Time Out* demanding 'a regular weekly gay community programme by and about gay people' (1985: 5).

It is important to look a bit more closely at the notion of gay and lesbian communities and audiences, which suggests a homogenous collective consciousness with clearly defined needs and demands. Gay men and lesbians were, and are, as diverse as the rest of the population, but the coherent demand for representation at the time, together with common points of struggle enabled the identification of a somehow definable gay audience. The politics of this were firmly rooted in the liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s.

One of the areas of programme making that I initiated at C4 was the establishment of a unique space within broadcasting for work with gay and lesbian content made primarily by gay and lesbian filmmakers and specifically addressing those audiences. Since it took to the air in 1982, C4 had shown a small number of programmes, films and series dealing with gay and lesbian stories and issues. These included *One in Five* (1983), *Framed Youth: Revenge of the Teenage Perverts* (1983) and a season of gay and lesbian film and video, *In the Pink* (1986), which premiered the US documentary, *The Times of Harvey Milk* (Robert Epstein, 1984), on UK television.

These programmes caused considerable controversy, particularly within the tabloids and on the Conservative government benches. In December 1982, only a month after the channel launched, Conservative MP John Carlisle demanded that the Independent Broadcasting Authority, which regulated C4, should 'tell Channel 4 to "clean up or get out"' (Anon, 1982) in a Commons debate largely initiated by the as-yet to be broadcast, *One in Five*. C4's media response was to defend the programmes, but also to reassure concerned viewers with comments to the press such as: 'We do a few gay programmes, and will carry on doing them. They go at carefully placed times, late in the evening, when most people can easily avoid them' (Anon, 1987).

The space for consistent and high-profile commissioning and scheduling of gay programmes was a battle hard fought within the channel and beyond. A notable and predictable opponent was Mary Whitehouse, who announced on behalf of the National Viewers and Listeners Association that she had written to C4 and other television companies warning against programmes suggesting that to be gay is normal or to be recommended 'in the light of . . . an AIDS epidemic' (1986). I think it is fair to say that the AIDS crisis, together with the controversy surrounding the government's Clause 28 legislation designed to prohibit the promotion of homosexuality in schools, opened up discussions about sexuality on television in the 1980s.

An explosion of programmes in 1986/87, including an AIDS week across the three public service and one commercial broadcasters in the United Kingdom, happened as a response to the growing concern about the spread of AIDS in the heterosexual community. However, the impact of AIDS on the gay community and the high profile of gay campaigners working around the issue meant a much greater visibility of gay men in society and in the media.

Television's response to the struggle around Clause 28 also reflected the status the campaign achieved in the political arena. The support of high-profile politicians and commentators in all areas of public life; the high visibility of such figures as Ian McKellen and Michael Cashman; the size and nature of demonstrations—the marches and direct action in the form of the House of Lords abseil and the *Six O'Clock BBC News* invasion—made it the stuff of television. AIDS and Clause 28 meant that for the first time, probably since the Sexual Offences Act in 1967, homosexuality was at the forefront of a significant and widespread public debate about sexuality.

The impetus was there for a major commitment by C4 to gay and lesbian programmes and it came in the form of the first series of 'Out on Tuesday', which started on Valentine's Day 1989. It ran for 8 weeks at 11 p.m. and was largely a magazine format with two to three linked items in each programme introduced by 'gay celebrities' including McKellen, Paul Gambacinni, Beatrix Campbell, Audre Lorde and Julian Clary. In many ways, the post-Gay Liberation Front (GLF) proliferation of the gay press had provided a public platform for gay and lesbian issues prior to C4 and the magazine format for 'Out on Tuesday' was driven largely by what was popular on TV at that time and the need to encompass a wide range of gay/lesbian voices.

The idea of catering for the whole range of tastes and interests across the gay and lesbian communities in 8 hours was, of course, impossible. My priorities were gender balance, a range of forms and high production values, as well as cultivating and resourcing a burgeoning sector of gay and lesbian filmmakers. Making a lot of shorter items across all 8 weeks would have been a way of trying to meet the challenges posed by the series, but depth and time for reflection were also important. The ideas that Stuart proposed for the series were consistently significant and complex with a strong visual and sound approach that called for longer screen time. He went on to edit feature-length versions of some of his programmes, for example, *Desire* (1990), for exhibition in cinema and festival contexts.

Following that first meeting with Stuart in 1987, he sent me a long proposal for a film he called 'Survivors', which would become *Desire*. It was incredibly well researched and

echoed many of the concerns of *Bright Eyes* in its exploration of the historical stigmatisation of gays. In his covering letter to me, he said that he had thought ‘it would be a fairly simple oral history project about the experiences of lesbians and gay men in concentration camps’ but that his research had led him to want make a programme which goes some way towards ‘understanding the complexity of the Nazi attitudes towards sexuality’ (Marshall, 1987; see Figure 1). What emerged from Stuart’s approach was a complex weaving of history, politics, psychoanalysis, philosophy and individual stories. It was also beautiful, moving and accessible. We ran *Desire* in Programme 3 of the ‘Out on Tuesday’ series. It was introduced by McKellen and lasted for the whole hour-long slot, achieving an audience of almost 1.3 million viewers and very positive responses from critics, viewers and within C4. I think the possibility of achieving this kind of impact was central to Stuart’s engagement with television.

RD: *Desire* was the first film Stuart made at Maya Vision and it perfectly encapsulates many of the threads that had led him to that moment. The themes he had developed in *Bright Eyes* were further developed in *Desire*: the identification and classification of ‘the Other’, hidden history and Jungian archetypes were explored and intercut with individual testimony, as the AIDS crisis and Clause 28 forcefully brought home: the personal is political.

The film was shot on 16-mm film and we made two different versions: one 88-minute film for cinema distribution, the other a 55-minute to fit a C4 hour was transferred to tape to broadcast. The cinema version was selected for the Berlin Film Festival, and other festivals around the world, winning the audience prize in Turin, while the television version was nominated for the Grierson award. In *Desire*, Stuart traced the developing cultural and political attitudes towards sexuality in Germany from 1910 to 1945, during which time competing forces struggled to define the parameters of masculinity and femininity. Interviews with historians and eyewitnesses documented the history of the homosexual rights movement and the social and sexual experiments of the revolutionary Weimar period, which culminated in the extreme persecution of sexual nonconformists under the Nazis. And yet the film was beautiful, even lyrical, as images of the German landscape and Nazi architecture were set to the music of Schubert and Mahler.

All Stuart’s films started with a very intense period of research, from which we would write a proposal. In the IFVD, the commissioning process was often in two stages, so if Caroline liked the idea we would put in a development budget promising to deliver a script, schedule and budget at the end of the development period. For Stuart, this was the time in which he thought about the ‘how’ of making the film and we thought about interviewees, locations, music, graphics – mood, style, image systems. Style and content: form and function continually met and changed each other. We did a fantastic initial interview with Marion de Ras from the University of Amsterdam, who had done her PhD in *Body Culture and Female Culture in the German Youth movement – 1900-1934* (see de Ras, 2012). She introduced me (perhaps Stuart already knew these ways of seeing) to the binary of ‘nature’ and ‘civilisation’ in German thought in the 1930s and the symbolism of the natural world as either male or female—‘the flowing river is male and the still lake is female’ (quote from *Desire*). This, of course, helped to create one of the

C A U G H T I N T H E A C T

THIRTY ONE CARTHEW ROAD LONDON W6 0DU TELEPHONE (01) 741 0073

Dear Stuart

Caroline Spry
Channel Four Television
60, Charlotte St.
London W1P 2AX

November 2, 1987

Dear Caroline,

I have enclosed a proposal for a programme titled **Survivors** which I have been working on since we had our meeting at Channel Four.

I thought that I should write a few words to you about the proposal which might be useful when you come to look at it.

I began work on the idea in the summer and thought at that time that it would be a fairly simple oral history project about the experiences of lesbians and gay men in concentration camps. In the late summer I went to Berlin to meet a number of lesbian and gay historians who I had been writing to during the summer. After lengthy discussion with them I realized that it would be difficult to deal with the subject "simply" as the historical evidence and the testimony of survivors suggested that the real situation was, in fact, extremely complex. Several of these historians were having to work with evidence that seemed extremely contradictory and the situation is not helped of course by the lack of support from official historians of the period. In general they were of the opinion that Nazi attitudes towards sexuality were much more complex than popular historians had come to believe and that Nazi homophobia bore on particular people who were open about their sexuality and sometimes ignored more covert sexual "perversions" under particular circumstances.

Whilst I was there I developed the analysis that I have outlined in this proposal and this perspective was greeted with interest by these historians. They have agreed to participate in a programme which would use such a perspective. Although it is unusual, it does seem to offer a good way of understanding the complexity of the Nazi attitudes towards sexuality.

I hope that this will be of interest to you and would be very happy to discuss any of the ideas, the treatment and this perspective further should you wish,

Best wishes,

Stuart Marshall

Stuart Marshall

Thanks for your letter and the Survivors proposal. It is certainly an interesting subject and we've keen to do something on it.
let's meet and discuss your ideas. Perhaps you could ring and arrange a suitable date.

Juli.
Can I have this
back.

Figure 1. Letter from Stuart Marshall to Caroline Spry, proposing the idea of 'Survivors', 2 November 1987. Reprinted with kind permission of Caroline Spry.

recurring image systems within the film and directed the research into the picture archives. Finally, these image systems informed the graphics used in the film (always done by Royston Edwards, Stuart's partner and a very accomplished designer who started XL Design and Accident). In some cases, we already knew the music we wanted to use over a sequence, and this affected how we shot the scene. For example, the music at the end of the film is Mahler's Rückert-Lieder, '*Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen/ I am lost to the world*'. We knew this would go over the crane shot that starts on the commemorative pink triangle on the ground and ends in the clouds – so music determined the pace of the move. With Stuart, every choice was deliberate: nothing was purely stylistic and nothing was incidental. 'Precision, resonance and rhetorical force', as the *Toronto Star* put it, 'that mark [*Desire*] as 'one of the best filmed social histories of recent years' (quoted in Dobbs, 1993).

CS: Stuart went on to make *Comrades in Arms* (1990), again for a full 1-hour slot, in the second series of 'Out on Tuesday' in 1990. Dealing with unrecognised gay men and lesbians who served in the armed forces during wartime, the film continued his interest in stigma, invisibility and oral history. Stuart's interest in, and commitment to, uncovering and retelling gay and lesbian history was a very important element in our series after the long years of silence within mass media.

RD: But as filmmakers we had one huge problem; there was no obvious archive of gay men and lesbians in a wartime context so Stuart decided to illustrate oral testimonies with newly shot 'archive' footage. He created a lost history by illustrating verbal testimonies, as accurately as possible with locations, costumes, props, etc. And I think those scenes show Stuart at his most playful: politically critical, subversive, making the audience review a seemingly classic, but fundamentally altered, set of images and all the time revelling in the pleasure that created for gay and lesbian audiences.

CS: *Desire* was Stuart's first foray into celluloid. As an artist, his move into television from video art was in many ways an obvious step. The relationship of video to its dominant 'sister' technology and site of representation was something that Stuart explored in his writings in the late 1970s. My C4 colleague, Rod Stoneman, remembers Stuart's advocacy of the art of video and complete dismissal of film. However, his embrace of the possibilities of reaching wider audiences and accessing bigger budgets meant that he overcame 'this cultural disgust over the next few years as he began to produce a substantial body of beautifully made and thoughtful documentaries... enjoying the specific visual pleasures of the dreaded celluloid' (quoted in Dobbs, 1993). He thoroughly embraced the aesthetic of film and in doing so brought an alluring and evocative sensuality to 'Out on Tuesday', alongside other directors such as Isaac Julien, Pratibha Parmar and Connie Giannaris. Future series of what was renamed 'OUT' screened more of Stuart's work including his final long form piece, *Over Our Dead Bodies* (1991), returning to an exploration of the politics of AIDS.

RD: *Over Our Dead Bodies* was a return to the rage of *Bright Eyes* after the filmic lyricism of *Desire* and *Comrades*. Towards the end of the edit, Stuart decided to shoot a new beginning to the film and he went to Venice for the opening scene. It is an intensely

beautiful, cinematic and moving commemoration of a response to an earlier plague and, in the film, it pre-frames the hard-hitting political message with a symbolic lesson from history: art and activism refocusing each other. And as always Stuart wanted to challenge, to prod, to ask: what can we make happen? And he was brilliant with titles. *OODBs* was a scream of defiance, but also a question of what would be written about, over and on the bodies of so many. He lashed out, but he also lashed in, attacking not just the church, state and medical bureaucracies, but also activism or the lack of it. As Simon Watney says in the film, we need to resist the idea that a diagnosis of HIV means death, a sentiment shared by Cindy Patton who stated that for the media and general public 'homosexuals = AIDS = death' (1985). For Stuart, this film continued to examine notions of otherness and the covert and to challenge the rise of moralising biopolitics. Simply put, we want to live not just to fight to be accepted as we die.

At this time, Positively Healthy was holding meetings at Maya Vision – Stuart was Co-Chair – and as increasing numbers of lesbians and gay men with something to say were working through Maya Vision, we decided to hold weekly film workshops to help develop skills and knowledge. Stuart, ever the teacher, understood that to create a counter discourse within television, the messengers had to understand the medium: the better to challenge and re-frame it

CS: His last television production was *Blue Boys* (1992), a shorter piece on the policing of pornography. The threads running through all of his films are clear: representation, history and the experience of being gay. They significantly contributed to changing the way in which the complexities, the delights, the injustices and the humanity of the lives of gay men and lesbians were perceived within television and in society

RD: In *Blue Boys*, Stuart was responding once more to the smell of moral panic and asked why police and customs officials were so keen to pursue and trap gay men. Why does the line between the public and private realm differ depending on sexuality? And what happens to real people in their real lives when the law targets and prosecutes them? Stuart called it a 'hard news documentary' I'm sure the word play was intentional.

By 1992, Stuart became increasingly worried about the medical establishment's control of the narrative of HIV = AIDS = DEATH and started to research a film about alternative treatment options for people with HIV. (Stuart was a proponent of Dr Joseph Sonnabend's multi-factorial hypothesis of HIV-AIDS that held out for other potential causes of AIDS other than the HIV virus. Yet Sonnabend and others like Michael Callen conceded HIV as the sole cause well before Stuart's death.) This film was never completed, but Stuart was talking to people with HIV and their doctors, while also digging into case histories of some of the earliest descriptions of AIDS like symptoms. He was in California on a research trip when he became very ill. At the same time, he was also compiling material for a project that he called, 'The Archive', (reprinted in this dossier), which became *A Bit of Scarlet* (1997), directed by Andrea Weiss and produced by me after his death. This was again Stuart at his most playful, mining British classic movies for overt and hidden references, some real some imposed, with which to delight gay and lesbian audiences and expose the paucity of 'real' representation in the history of cinema.

Stuart was a prolifically creative gay man and political activist, he published essays on film and video and insisted on presenting alternative interpretations of sexual politics. He came to love the democracy of television—the broadcasting of ideas—and saw it as one of the spaces that artists and agitators, the marginalised, the hidden and the threatened had to move into in order to challenge the discourse, reframe the argument and in a John Berger sense change our ways of seeing (see Berger, 2008). But for Stuart, as for many of us, at that time the AIDS crisis underpinned and affected everything. The last word is Stuart's.

There remains, however, a space for intervention and contestation and this is provided by those media – performance, visual arts, video, film, printed media – through which the AIDS affected communities can and do address themselves. Only through these media is there a possibility of opening up the contradictions within the apparent homogeneity of medical discourse or of producing radically different conceptualizations of the body, disease and health. In this way it is possible to produce new representations which offer new possibilities for identification, which speak complex, difficult and contradictory experiences of AIDS. It is only through these media that we can hope to find decent, respectful representations of AIDS and its impact upon the affected communities. It is only through these media that we can communicate the information upon which our very survival depends. (Marshall, 1990)

Caroline Spry and Rebecca Dobbs

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IMAGE: Bright Eyes. Production Shot 2

