David Wojnarowicz by Peter Hujar (1981)

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Did no one tell you that smoking kills?
I suppose if they had you would have laughed;
you must have known even then that you were dying.
Sure, it was years before the diagnosis - this photograph -
but still, you must have known. Isn’t that what it was like
back then? Your eyes all in shadow, collarbones and veins
in topographic relief as though the sickness has already taken hold.
It’s hard to tell if the cigarette is even in your mouth or if
it’s just a prop, a statement, all for the art, thrown away
once the shoot is over. Or was it real? Did Peter
behind the camera jokingly chide you
for not thinking of your health, and
did you both laugh grimly, knowing what lay
at the end of the decade? Isn’t that what it was like
for us? Back then? Every flutter of the heart
another tick on the doomsday clock, everyone
heading to the same inevitable grave.
That would explain your eyes:
staring at nothing, in the dark.