

Publicized with a Price
December 11th, 2016

Sarah Beaverson
Professor Stewart
GLHTH 302 Global Narratives of HIV/AIDS

Word Count: 783
MLA

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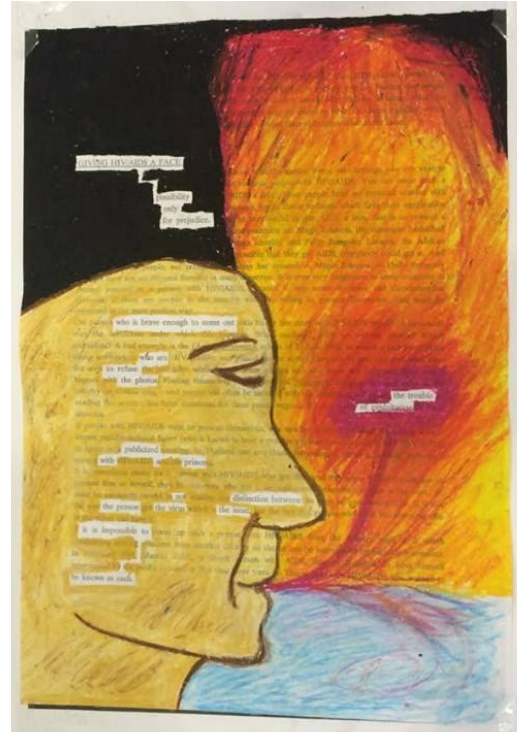
Giving HIV/AIDS a Face exposes the conflict between the desire for HIV/AIDS individuals to share their story and the danger these individuals face of society exploiting their stories. The solo piece by Beaverson on display in Perkins Library is part of a larger collaborative project, *A Humument Project of Maria de Bruyn HIV/AIDS Archives*, aiming to give new insights into the language of intervention and HIV/AIDS by exploring archival material through a creative lens. The blending of art, archives and poetry creates a thought provoking collection on a unique way information about HIV/AIDS can be disseminated to the public.

Written narrative is an essential part of *Giving HIV/AIDS a Face*. Within the artwork Beaverson crafts a poem from the words of an archival document, modeled off the style of Tom Phillips in his work *The Humument*. The original written piece Beaverson uses, an excerpt from *Policies to Influence the Portrayal and Image of HIV/AIDS and/or People with HIV/AIDS*, was written and presented by Ivan Wolffers, a notable Dutch physician and medical writer at the 8th International Conference on AIDS in 1992 in Amsterdam, in 1992.

While Wolffers originally presents the piece as a policy recommendation explaining how it can be useful for the media to “give a face to HIV/AIDS” by encouraging HIV positive individuals to share their stories for HIV/AIDS prevention and education campaigns, Beaverson transforms the meaning of the original and presents a poem that highlights the dangers HIV positive individuals face when society exploits their individual stories. The portrayal of the poem alongside the artistic image exposes the tension between the consequences and benefits of people publicly presenting themselves as a person with HIV/AIDS. **HOW???**

In the original, Wolffers states, “It is not the way the person got the virus which is the issue, but the fact that people who look like everyone else in the street can have it” (Wolffers). Beaverson challenges this statement. The lines “Publicized with a price / no distinction between / the person, the virus, the issue” suggest that, counter to Wolffers’ argument that giving HIV/AIDS a face promotes the commonality of HIV/AIDS, in reality giving HIV/AIDS a face reduces the individuality of the story and as a result the experience and emotions of the individual are diminished.

At an initial glance, the striking side profile is the first image our eyes are drawn to. Beaverson presents the viewer with a face of HIV – a side profile face that is artistically defined but not distinguishable. The lack of a distinguishable face shows the generalization and exploitation of the “face of HIV/AIDS” that typically occurs in the



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media and by society. ***Too absolute, too inside the mind of the artist.***

The danger in HIV positive individuals sharing their story is that they are communalized as people to represent one population. Their individuality is lost as they become to voice to speak on behalf of their community, country or race. In their attempts to give HIV/AIDS a face, they create a generalized representation of HIV/AIDS when in reality the causes and issues around the disease are unique to every individual whom contracts it. ***How do you know? Where does this come from?***

The transition of colors in the piece plays with the tension between the liberation and suppression of speaking out. Initially, seeing the transition from solid black to a brighter mix of red/yellow, the viewer is drawn to think that the words flowing from the face's mouth serve as a light in the darkness— an almost liberation of sorts. As the words “travel” through the blue water and yellow sky, they give life to the area surrounding them. ***How do you know? Needs the intermediate step here.***

However, a closer look reveals that the voice coming out of the mouth leads to a phrase: “the trouble of exploitation”. The words dissipate into the background and are engulfed by the surroundings. As individuals share their stories, exploitation by society, culture and media can distort and morph the message so that it slowly dissipates and becomes lost in the surroundings. As the words lose their individuality, so too does the individual lose their personal story to the general rhetoric. We are reminded, again, there is “no distinction between the person, the virus, the issue”. ***Needs more.***

James Kidd, art correspondent for the South China Morning Post describes Phillips' The Humument project as, “both a collaboration and a collision: between language and the visual, and between Mallock and Phillips” (Kidd). Beaverson has successfully modeled this approach by expressing the collision between personal expression and societal exploitation. The success of HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns depends upon the dissemination of information and HIV/AIDS education. However, as this piece exemplifies, there is danger in doing so. Going forward, we must challenge our typical assumptions and reduction of HIV/AIDS to a single face and single experience.

Works Cited

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