

Just One Pill
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Professor Stewart

GLHTH 302 Narratives of HIV/AIDS

720 words

MLA 8

Introduction

The development of innovative medical technologies has been crucial in the global battle against HIV/AIDS, and the discovery of methods to measure viral load in 1996 served as a significant advancement in the fight. This finding allowed researchers to test the efficacy of antiretroviral therapies and led to the introduction of combination drug treatments to combat HIV/AIDS (Hoffmann and Noah). The success of combination drug treatments was first introduced on a global scale at the 11th International Conference on AIDS in Vancouver in July 1996. Highly active antiretroviral therapy (HAART) shifted the prognosis for HIV/AIDS away from death to a manageable, chronic illness, but it quickly became apparent that access to it would be limited in developing countries, the areas that needed it most (International AIDS Society). Student artist, Nick Santangelo, utilizes a page of highlights from the 11th International Conference on AIDS to create a piece that seeks to modernize the scope of scientific innovation and to highlight continued challenges with the accessibility of these advancements globally.

The Text

The text in Santangelo's piece is revealed through a style adapted from Tom Phillips' *A Humument*, which features pages with chunks of text intentionally obscured to tell a different story. In reviewing Phillips work, Adam Smyth exclaims "*A Humument* invokes recent technologies", and commends Phillip's ability to make "temporal leaps" (Smyth). Like the work of Phillips, Santangelo emphasizes the change of time through advancements in medical technologies. Scientific speculation in the original document is solidified to reflect current medical capabilities, and initial concerns of accessibility are highlighted to emphasize its continued need for consideration. The reader, however, is still able to see many of the original words through the colored pencil, which indicates a history that is known but nevertheless stuck in the past. In his review, Smyth argues that "*A Humument* is a reminder that books are inevitably intertextual – they grow out of older texts", which can be extended to the interconnected nature of the words in Santangelo's work to the words of the original document.

The Art

Moving beyond the technological advancements and medical breakthroughs, Santangelo's art addresses the message posed by the last sentence of highlighted text: access to effective antiretroviral treatment is not universal. The perfectly aligned pills at the top of the page are colored red and blue, which may reference the colors of the flags for the United States or the United Kingdom. Overall, the concept can be extended to represent all developed countries, which have access to plentiful supplies of antiretroviral treatment and can effectively utilize the technological advances described at the top of the page. As the reader moves down the page, Santangelo shifts the text to address the issue of drug access in developing countries. He strategically parallels this textual shift with the visual shift in the organization and color of the descending pill rows. The third and fourth rows of pills feature fewer pills and half-colored pills to describe the loss of effectiveness of new medical technologies as they spread from developed

countries. Moreover, the final pill lands inside the continent of Africa, but Santangelo leaves this one white to highlight that it fails to have the same impact in developing countries, like those in Africa, as it does in developed ones, like the United States and United Kingdom. With respect to the title of the piece, it takes just one pill to manage HIV, and, as depicted in this piece, developing countries have started to gain access to these treatments. However, as illustrated by the limited reach of the waves of color emanating from the singular pill on the African continent in Santangelo's piece, developed countries still do not have enough resources to effectively combat HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion

By mirroring the style employed in Tom Phillip's *A Humument*, Santangelo not only recognizes that it takes just one pill a day to manage HIV/AIDS given today's technology, but also that developing countries still face notable losses due to it. While treatments exist to effectively manage the disease, parts of the globe lack the resources to properly care for those directly affected by it. Modern literature may focus its attention on HIV/AIDS statistics or even the narratives of those living with the disease, but it's still important to recognize the big picture and focus on preserving the lives of those affected.

Works Cited

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