

Drawing the line against AIDS

The University of Adelaide, 4-5 February 2010

Program

Thursday, 4 February 2010

9 – 9:30am: Registration and Coffee

9:30 – 10am: Welcome and Introduction

10 – 11am: Keynote Presentation

Albert Winn

My Life Until Now...

11am – 12:30pm: Mourning and Militancy

Graham Willett

ACT UP and the Art of Activism

Jennifer Power

Rites of Belonging: AIDS Memorials as Political Practice

12:30 – 2pm: Lunch (provided)

2 – 3:40pm: Iconic Images

Richard Sawdon Smith

The Anatomical Man: Drawing the Line on the AIDS Body

Trevor Dougherty

ACON(ic) Images

Marcus Patterson

The Invisible Man

3:40 – 4pm: Afternoon Tea

4 – 6pm: Artists at Work: Africa and Australia

Admire Mare

Addressing AIDS-related Grief and Pain through Creative Art: A Critical Reflection of the Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children Memory Work Programming in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Tinashe Chidanyika

An Exploration into the Role of Local Musicians in Breaking the Silences around HIV/AIDS in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Matthew Jackson

Representing AIDS in the 21st Century

Peter Fenoglio

Art Activism and Making an Impact

Friday, 5 February 2010

9 – 10am: Screenings

William Yang and Tony Ayres (dir.)

Sadness: A Monologue with Slides

Victoria Pitt (dir.)

Rampant: How a City Stopped a Plague

10 – 10:30am: Morning Tea

10:30am – 12pm: Photographs and Cartoons

Kathy Triffitt

Re-positioning the Positive Voice (1988-2009)

Kenton Penley Miller

AIDS Cartoons and HIV Prevention – No Laughing Matter?

Paul Sendziuk

Zapiro as Zorro: Political Cartooning in South Africa

12 – 1pm: Lunch

1 – 3:00pm: Art and Public Health

Niyi Awofeso

HIV Advocacy and its Changing Boundaries

William Leonard

The Politics of Representation: The Unholy Marriage of Art and Science in Gay Men's HIV/AIDS Prevention in Australia

Kim Davis

CHASE: Collaborative HIV Art for Social Equity

3 – 3:30pm: Afternoon Tea

3:30 – 4:30pm: Roundtable

Panellists: Albert Winn, Richard Sawdon Smith, Kathy Triffitt

4:30pm: Official Close

Thursday, 10-11am: Keynote Presentation

My Life Until Now...

Albert J. Winn

Albert Winn has been at the forefront of cultural production about HIV/AIDS since the 1980s. His writing and photographic work is primarily autobiographical and addresses issues of identity, especially as it relates to religion, ethnicity, gender or sexuality and how each informs the other in a context of illness, personal relationships and memory. He received a National Endowment for the Arts / Western States Arts Federation Fellowship in 1993 for a collection of photographs and stories titled 'My Life Until', which dealt with his life as a gay Jewish man living with HIV/AIDS. He received a fellowship from the Memorial Foundation of Jewish Culture in 2000, was an artist-in-residence at Blue Mountain Center in Blue Mountain, NY, and an Artist-in-Residence at Light Work, in Syracuse, New York. He is the creator of 'Blood on the Doorpost...the AIDS Mezuzah' which was installed at the Judah L. Magnus Museum in Berkeley for World AIDS Day in 1996. His work is in the permanent collections of The Library of Congress, The Jewish Museum (New York City), the Museum of Fine Arts (Houston), Light Work (Syracuse University), and the Visual AIDS Archive (NYC).

Thursday, 11am-12:30pm: Mourning and Militancy

ACT UP and the Art of Activism

Graham Willett

BY the time ACTUP emerged in Australia in April 1990 in response to the 'normalisation' of AIDS policy, the normalisation of contentious politics was also a problem. Demos were no longer cutting it. They got less attention from the media and generally mobilised few people. Given the urgency of the problem that HIV-positive people faced, it is not surprising that they wanted to act. What is surprising, perhaps, is the levels of creativity with which they acted. In this paper I want to explore the activities of ACTUP in Australia. In particular, drawing upon the collections held by the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives, I want to examine the uses of theatricality to break through media and community indifference. I will also explore whether or not we can identify a particularly Australian element to these activities or whether ACTUP in Australia was simply another aspect of the broader Americanisation of political activism and community-building.

Biography

Graham Willett is Senior Lecturer in Australian Studies at the University of Melbourne. He researches and has written extensively on gay and lesbian politics in Australia and in the British world more generally. He is author of *Living Out Loud*, a history of gay and lesbian activism in Australia as well as many articles and chapters. He is president of the Australian Lesbian and Gay Archives. He has a particular interest in the ways in which gay/lesbian/queer politics and history are public activities.

Rites of Belonging: AIDS Memorials as Political Practice

Jennifer Power

The AIDS Memorial Quilt and annual Candlelight Vigils are internationally recognised memorials to people who have died from HIV/AIDS. This paper details some of the history of the Australian Quilt project and Candlelight Vigils and explores the way in which these memorials present a challenge to the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS. The use of symbolic actions and ritualised performance in AIDS memorials offers a unique contribution to political action around HIV/AIDS. The political views and vision of AIDS activists are expressed not only through language and argument, but through the use of cultural symbols to evoke emotion, empathy and social connection between spectators, activists and people living with HIV/AIDS. AIDS memorials also create a public platform in which people affected by HIV/AIDS can grieve collectively. In the context of the shame and stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS in the early 1990s, these memorials played an important role in legitimising and publicly acknowledging the intense feelings of grief and loss experienced by many who had lost loved-ones to HIV/AIDS. The concept of 'social movement frames' and theories of the social role of ritual and cultural performance are used to explore the ideas presented in this paper.

Biography:

Jennifer Power is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Bouverie Centre, LaTrobe University. Her current research is on the experiences of lesbian and gay parents. She was previously employed as a Research Officer at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society where she worked on the HIV Futures study. Her PhD looked at the history and impact of AIDS activism in Australia.

Thursday, 2 – 3:40pm: Iconic Images

The Anatomical Man: Drawing the Line on the AIDS Body

Richard Sawdon Smith

This paper explores the AIDS body as a site of contest by presenting a recent body of visual work, one that quite literally draws the line against AIDS on the body through the tattooing (a process that draws blood) of medical illustrations depicting veins and arteries – the veins from which the nurse seeks to draw blood to test (ill)health; a consistent, regular and repetitive invasive process that marks the existence of HIV.

This paper investigates the phenomenon of living with a body that at times appears absent, at times alien, while resisting the categorisation of Other or being classified as a representation of medical objectification. The research analyses the change in subjectivity that comes with a life threatening illness by interrogating notions of the body defined by scientific discovery. This sets up a dialogue between the body-as-self and the body-as-other, the doubling of the body creating representation of illness that can be articulated as the uncanny.

A basis of this research is the desire to establish an identity by making sense of experiences of health and illness, using photography as a way of exploring this shifting identity. The relationship between photography and how it has been used as a tool to define notions of the modern body are paramount to this study. The research treads a thin line between countering the perceived objective nature of photography, denying its ability to reveal some hidden truth with its ability to provide a positive endorsement of the subject's position in the world.

This paper is proposed as a hybrid artist/academic talk as performance that incorporates a multimedia presentation, using photography, drawings and prints (through PowerPoint) and HDV screening with sound.

Biography:

The British photographer Richard Sawdon Smith (b 1963, England) is Associate Dean, Head of the Postgraduate School at the University for the Creative Arts, UK. He is Co-editor of Langford's Basic Photography and on the editorial panel of The Journal of Photography & Culture. He was winner of the John Kobal / London National Portrait Gallery Portrait Award 1997 and his photographs and writing are published in a variety of books including; Kelly Norman Ellis (ed.), *Space Between Us: An AIDS Anthology* (2009); Wendy Everett (ed.), *Cultures of Exile* (2004); David Company, *Art & Photography* (2004); Emmanuel Cooper, *Male Bodies: A Photographic History of the Nude* (2004) & *Fully Exposed: The Male Nude in Photography* (1990); *Pandemic: Facing AIDS* (2003); Gabriele Griffin, *Representations of HIV and AIDS: Visibility Blue/s* (2000), and Chris Townsend, *Vile Bodies: Photography and the Crisis of Looking* (1998). His photography has been exhibited widely around the world.

ACON(ic) Images

Trevor Dougherty

The AIDS Council of NSW (ACON) has been at the centre of HIV prevention programs within the gay community since its inception in 1985. HIV and its impact on the gay community and ACON's responses have gone through many changes since that time. The presentation will provide an overview and evaluation of the changes in how image has been used in ACON's HIV-prevention work over the years. Campaigns have moved from addressing AIDS prevention information, to addressing barriers, to the adoption of HIV preventive behaviours, to highlighting dangers of specific sexual practices and social contexts by utilising imagery and colloquial language consistent with the values of the gay community. I will historically chart the changes in HIV prevention that have occurred within the gay community through ACON's media and communication strategies to analyse the imagery in terms of the symbolism and meaning of ACON's HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns. I will describe why particular types of images were used: what was their intent, what did the people who designed them believe they were going to convey through those images, and why did they believe that was important? How did gay men, and particularly those at highest risk, interpret those images and how did that affect the way they responded to what was being said? How did the images reflect aspects of gay community life, or challenge them, and why did that matter? How were the images used by ACON (in what formats and why), and how were they represented and discussed within the gay community?

Biography:

Trevor Dougherty has a degree with Honours in Media and Communications and is currently undertaking a Masters of Arts by Research at the National Centre in HIV Social Research at UNSW. He is investigating and evaluating the evolution of ACON's use of images in HIV-prevention work over the years. Trevor's interest in this research topic reflects not only his professional experience as a Research Assistant with the National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research involved in the collection and assessment of data concerning HIV/AIDS and other aspects of sexual health among gay and other homosexually active men in Sydney, and his time as a volunteer for HIV/AIDS support services, but also his personal interest in gay history and particularly his own experience as a gay man who has had friends, lovers and acquaintances who have been affected by HIV/AIDS.

The Invisible Man

Marcus Patterson

The invisibility of male/masculine affirming Trans people (sometimes called FTM's) who identify as Gay, Bisexual, or men-who-have-sex-with-men (MSM) in relation to Health Promotion and representation in the Arts (esp. the media) when targeting HIV/AIDS promotion and safe sex information is an area that has received little exposure. This paper seeks to explore a range of Art /Advertising and Health Promotions and their reliance on the "one size fits all condom". I review some of the scant information currently available in this area, and make a number of proposals for increased awareness of developing inclusive practices that recognises the needs of trans (sex and gender diverse men). Trans men's lived experiences and ways of engaging in sexual activity are seldom considered by those involved in the area of HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. There is a need to take action to break down the barriers that often result in social isolation discrimination and stigma associated with being invisible in a culture that is phallic and body image focussed so that they include the diverse bodies of all men.

Biography

Marcus Patterson has been involved in the area of Human Rights and Health issues for Sex and Gender Diverse men for more than ten years. He has spent time as a member of the Victorian Attorney General's Advisory Committee on GLBTI issues and has also participated in the development of papers for the Victorian Minister for Health's Advisory Committee. He has worked as a Secondary Music Teacher and Educator in the past and is currently undertaking studies towards an LLB (grad) at Flinders University, South Australia.

Addressing AIDS-related Grief and Pain through Creative Art: A Critical Reflection of the Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children Memory Work Programming in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Admire Mare

This paper seeks to make sense of the role of creative art in the lives of orphans and other vulnerable children engaged in the memory work programme which is facilitated by Red Cross in Zimbabwe. It explores the dynamics, efficacy and relevance of creative art as a strategy of AIDS activism and AIDS prevention. The paper deploys conceptual and theoretical tools gleaned from the work of Giddens particularly his notion of 'autobiographical narratives' to make sense of the broader phenomenon described here as creative art and AIDS activism. It argues that creative art bridges the communication gap between foster carers and children and opens up a channel for child-centred counselling. It asserts that memory books help children build an identity and strengthen emotional capacity, equip them to deal with stigma and discrimination, to understand the past and be less afraid of the future. It argues that memory books play an important part in the bereavement processes and enhance story-telling by children. It argues that this form of creative art through OVC clubs promotes peer support for children through child-to-child counselling, sharing experiences and testimonies to build resilience. Using a child-centred research methodology anchored in oral histories and focus group discussions, this paper reveals that creative art is a community child-centred approach which builds a coping mechanism of positive attributes in children through empowerment, education and psycho-social healing. It nurtures the resilience to transcend grief, loss and pain in children orphaned by HIV and AIDS.

Biography

Admire Mare is a Zimbabwean academic based at Rhodes University who has lectured at University of Zimbabwe, Harare Polytechnic School of Journalism and Media Studies and Great Zimbabwe. He holds a Masters in Sociology and Social Anthropology, Bsc. Honours in Sociology and a Diploma in Mass Communication. He is waiting to be conferred with an MA in Journalism and Media Studies by Rhodes University. Admire has worked on internationally funded research projects as a researcher and consultant, and has presented papers on HIV and AIDS and media, survival strategies, new media technology, community reporting of HIV and AIDS and transitional justice processes.

An Exploration into the Role of Local Musicians in Breaking the Silences around HIV/AIDS in Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Tinashe Chidanyika

Abstract:

Understanding factors giving rise to sustained patterns of sexual behaviour that allow transmission are of paramount importance if HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns are to be effectively formulated and implemented. The issues surrounding prevention, transmission, and mitigation of HIV are complex. Stigma is one concept sustaining the epidemic in Zimbabwe.

Consequentially, there is a corresponding level of denialism and secrecy that supports HIV/AIDS silence at all levels of Zimbabwean society, including government officials and politicians, religious leaders and faith based groups, health officials, media and artists. This has not only allowed the failure to give HIV/AIDS a high profile on the political agenda, but also a dramatic increase in the number of people living with HIV and thus who have died of AIDS-related illness in Zimbabwe since the late 1980s. AIDS denialism is not limited to Zimbabwe, but is also a major setback in HIV/AIDS intervention across southern African, especially in South Africa. The task of this paper is to highlight the extent of the role of musicians in supporting HIV/AIDS awareness, and breaking down silences on the disease in Masvingo. I contend that, against a dim cloud of stigmatisation and silence surrounding HIV in Zimbabwe, musicians have and are: creatively 'naming and language-ing' HIV/AIDS in songs, publicly speaking HIV and disclosing their status, openly singing about sex- related bio-medical and reproduction issues, and encouraging abstinence and condom use in their attempt to break HIV/AIDS silence.

Representing AIDS in the 21st Century

Matthew Jackson

Biography:

Matthew Jackson is a visual artist who lives in Western Australia. He has been painting for almost two decades and his work has been shown in exhibitions in Australia and overseas. Matthew teaches Painting and Drawing, and is currently employed by Edith Cowan University in Perth, where he teaches Cultural History and Theory for the School of Communications and Art. Examples of Matthew's work can be found at: www.matthewjackson.com.au.

Art Activism and Making an Impact

Peter Fenoglio

Friday, 9am: Screenings

This morning offers the option of attending one of two film screenings (each is approx. 50 mins).

William Yang and Tony Ayres (dir.)

Sadness: A Monologue with Slides

Sadness is a film version of William Yang's theatre piece of the same name. Yang is a social photographer in Sydney. The idea for this production came about in the early 90s when he looked back over his diaries and realised he had been to more wakes than parties over the years. In the film he says he felt compelled to tell the stories of his friends in order to unburden himself of the things he had seen. It begins with Yang looking at slides of friends who have died of AIDS. It then shifts focus to explore issues of identity in relationship to family. There are two sides to this story: the Chinese and the gay and they have come together over grief.

Victoria Pitt (dir.)

Rampant: How a City Stopped a Plague

Rampant is the story of AIDS in Australia, and how our response to the disease – so radically different to that in the USA and other countries with conservative governments – made us world leaders in controlling the virus, which had the potential to become a plague. Drawing in a cast of characters from Federal Ministers to nuns to sex workers, Australia forged a radical path in its approach to the disease, tapping into the networks of junkies, prostitutes and practising gay men who were the most susceptible to infection. Led by the Minister for Health under the Hawke government, Neal Blewett, Australia undertook several unprecedented and pragmatic steps: it introduced a needle exchange program for intravenous drug users, encouraged open discussion of safe sex, and created the famous Grim Reaper advertising campaign. There was fierce opposition from the religious right, but 25 years after the initial AIDS outbreak, Australia's decision to accept human nature in policy making has saved thousands of lives – especially when compared to the USA where 'morality' has outweighed practicality in dealing with the illness.

Exclusive interviews with journalist and AIDS activist Ita Buttrose, former politicians Neal Blewett and Bill Bowtell, the Reverend Fred Nile, St. Vincent's Hospital doctors and the founding member of the Australian Prostitutes Collective bring 1980s Sydney at the height of AIDS hysteria to life.

Friday, 10:30am – 12pm: Photographs and Cartoons

Re-positioning the Positive Voice (1988-2009)

Kathy Triffitt

This paper will report on the various ways the meaning of HIV is articulated and negotiated in a number of contexts, in particular in Australian government health initiatives, health-communication and promotion literature and popular culture (media and television). Drawing on a review of the community arts project - 'am i dead sweetheart? (1990-1998)' - and the social marketing work of Positive Life, NSW (2007-2009), this paper will describe the cultural practices produced by people with HIV to not only challenge powerful media and medical narratives, but also to respond to and manage an HIV-positive diagnosis.

Cultural documents (multi-media diaries – of image and text, social marketing and health promotion materials), interviews, focus and discussion groups, and other empirical material register the varied ways in which HIV-positive bodies are modified, selves are formed and transformed, and culturally specific knowledges and practices are mediated and transfigured. HIV-positive people speak through the culture that 'produced' and 'influenced' them and, as a consequence, open up for discussion the social, institutional and subjective spaces which they occupy daily.

A cultural practice that respects and reproduces community norms, values, ethics (ways of living), styles of expression and resources (community structures, skills and capacities) has made a significant contribution to the development of effective models of translation – from a rhetoric

of lived experiences to social, political and cultural change. This paper also examines the capacity of such a practice to negotiate the contemporary ‘silences’ and ‘social invisibility’ of HIV, and to reaffirm the positive voice.

Biography:

Kathy Triffitt is currently Senior Project Officer in Social Marketing and Education, Positive Life NSW. She has worked with various HIV community organisations and on education programs over the last two decades, including consultancy advice to the National AIDS Trust (London); to Positive Arts (ABC documentary on HIV and the visual arts in Australia); and to the National HIV/AIDS Anti-Discrimination Campaign 1992 (Australia). Kathy has also worked for several years as a Lecturer in Arts & Education at the University of Newcastle. She recently completed her PhD in the Centre for Research in Citizenship, Deakin University, Melbourne.

AIDS Cartoons and HIV Prevention – No Laughing Matter?

Kenton Penley Miller

Working as a cartoonist for Australia’s then-national gay magazine (Outrage) at the time that AIDS fully reared its head here, I was instructed to avoid AIDS as a subject matter, the editors decrying it as unfit for cartoons. In my presentation I aim to show how HIV worked its way rapidly into my single framers, reflecting a very different place of HIV and AIDS in the gay community in the late ‘80s and early ‘90s.

In no time I seroconverted one of the main characters of my regular cartoon strip “Bent at the Knees” so that I could, through cartoons, offer an alternative to both the demonising of men with HIV and AIDS by the mainstream, and the fear and medicalisation of them within our community. I also killed off one of the main (HIV negative) characters to explore some of the grief responses that were there in our community at the time.

At the same time I found myself producing cartoons as tools of HIV prevention. I want to explore, in this paper, the changing role these played. From contributing to a safe sex culture, and as a tool of safe sex education, through to a later reflection of the need for dialogue, processing and negotiation, cartoons filled a gap between poster and print. The talk will be amply illustrated with examples of the works discussed.

Biography

Kenton Penley Miller is a gay man who happens to be a cartoonist. He worked in the HIV/AIDS and challenging homophobia field for around 15 years, before moving on to other public health and social justice roles. He’s delivered condoms to brothels, taught people to shoot up safely, volunteered in gay activism, devised and ran a same-sex relationship course for five years - and did oral sex nationally, among other social marketing campaigns. He currently teaches people about their rights and responsibilities under the Victorian Charter and continues to illustrate books and manuals in his spare time.

Zapiro as Zorro: Political Cartooning in South Africa

Paul Sendziuk

Jonathon Shapiro (pen name Zapiro) can lay claim to being the most politically important artist making work about the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Producing up to seven cartoons per week for daily newspapers in the country with the highest number of HIV/AIDS cases, Zapiro has been an outspoken critic of prominent leaders of the South African government who have denied that HIV causes AIDS and subsequently delayed the implementation of anti-retroviral treatment programs. In 2006 Zapiro produced a scathing cartoon depicting Jacob Zuma, who was charged and sensationally acquitted of raping a young woman but admitted that he took a shower after their 'consensual' sex to avoid getting AIDS. At the time, Zuma was a member of South Africa's National AIDS Council, and is now the President of the country. Zuma sued Zapiro for R15 million in an effort to censor the artist, an act designed to counteract the power that influential artists have to sway the hearts and minds of their audiences. My paper will introduce the work of Zapiro, who deserves to be known more widely outside of South Africa, display and contextualise some of his most powerful HIV/AIDS related cartoons, and discuss the controversies which his work has provoked.

Biography

Paul Sendziuk is a Senior Lecturer in the School of History and Politics at the University of Adelaide. He specializes in twentieth-century Australian History, with particular interests in post-war immigration, public health and the history of disease. Paul's most recent book is *Learning to Trust: Australian Responses to AIDS*, which was short-listed for the 2004 Human Rights Award (bestowed by Australia's Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission). His most recent articles have appeared in international journals and magazines such as *Dissent*, *Health and History*, *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, and *Australian Studies*. In collaboration with Visual AIDS, Paul is currently working on a project titled 'The Art of AIDS Prevention: Cultural Responses to HIV/AIDS in Australia, South Africa and the United States'. He is also responsible for the project's website: <http://www.thebody.com/visualaids/australia>.

Friday, 1 – 3:30pm: Art and Public Health

HIV Advocacy and its Changing Boundaries

Prof. Niyi Awofeso, PhD (presenter)

A/Prof. Anu Rammohan, PhD

Ms. Kim Brooklyn, M.Psych

Advocacy plays a major role in translating health research into policy and practice, as well as in influencing supportive public opinion. Following the CDC's June 1981 publication of the occurrence, without any known cause, of *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia in five homosexual men in Los Angeles, a general awareness of Human Immunodeficiency Virus evolved worldwide. Paralleling preliminary associations between HIV and homosexuality, there was increased prominence of the religious right and conservative governments in framing HIV as a punishment from 'God' for immoral behaviours such as homosexuality.

Advocacy for HIV evolved from the early 1990s, as the first generation of effective treatments became available. Advocacy was undertaken on many fronts, such as Randy Shilts' *And the Band Played On*, which attacked the Reagan's administration's perceived homophobia and complacency in responding to a major global public health crisis. Also noteworthy was the successful collaboration between South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign and the international medical humanitarian organization – Medecins Sans Frontieres - for access to antiviral HIV treatments.

This paper examines the evolution of HIV advocacy and its changing conceptual and operational boundaries. The authors focus on two advocacy streams: (1) major frameworks adopted by advocates for de-stigmatisation and improved treatment access for HIV-infected individuals: Humanitarian, Human Rights, and Public Health. The strengths and limitations of each of these perspectives are discussed; (2) Advocacy Mix components – Precision, Passion, Promptness, Perseverance and Personality. Strategies for optimal adaptation of the Advocacy Mix for uplifting the dignity, treatment access and human rights of HIV sufferers are discussed.

Biography

Niyi Awofeso is a Professor of Public Health at the University of Western Australia, and a Conjoint Professor of Public Health at the University of New South Wales. As Senior Medical Officer in charge of the Kaduna State Tuberculosis Control Program in Nigeria during the 1990s, he was on the frontline in diagnosing the first cases of HIV-related tuberculosis cases in northern Nigeria. In the late 1990s, he was actively involved in advocacy for the welfare of itinerant Muslim pupils (“Almajiri”) in northern Nigeria. He conceptualised the 5 Ps of health advocacy – Precision, Passion, Promptness, Perseverance and Personality – in 2003.

The Politics of Representation: The Unholy Marriage of Art and Science in Gay Men's HIV/AIDS Prevention in Australia

William Leonard

This paper argues that over the last 25 years those working in HIV/AIDS prevention have developed a new health promotion aesthetic—what I'll be calling a “safe-sex aesthetic”—which challenges a long-standing distinction between erotic or pornographic and scientific modes of representation. The scientific mode has been used extensively in health education and promotion, from medical text books to public health campaigns. It can be conceptualised as a sort of minimalist realism where the bare facts are presented in a neutral, dispassionate and objective manner. Erotica, by contrast, taps into circuits of desire and fantasy and is understood to bypass the viewer's rational processes altogether. In Australia, the circulation of erotica has been confined to the art gallery, art-house cinema and advertising. Put crudely, the scientific mode is meant to educate, the erotic to excite.

The use of sexually explicit materials in gay men's HIV/AIDS education in Australia, however, has questioned the usefulness and validity of the opposition between realism and fantasy, between scientific and erotic or artistic modes of representation. This paper offers a review of the

history of gay men's HIV/AIDS prevention in Australia, looking at the different ways in which it has relied on a fusion of the scientific and the erotic. The paper argues that this safe-sex aesthetic has increased the reach and effectiveness of gay men's HIV/AIDS prevention campaigns. However, the eruption of art in gay men's sexual health promotion has been used by those who oppose any public representation of gay male sex or intimacy to raise legal objections to such campaigns on the grounds that they are obscene, disgusting or incite homosexual behaviour.

Biography

William Leonard has developed and taught courses on sexuality and gender at RMIT and Monash Universities and worked as the Executive Officer to the Victorian Ministerial Advisory Committee on Gay and Lesbian Health. He has overseen the development of state and national GLBTI health and wellbeing research, policy and programs and is currently a research fellow at the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society, La Trobe University. His research interests include critical sexuality and gender studies, gay men's drug use, heterosexist violence and same sex partner abuse, and policy responses to rising rates of HIV among gay men. William has published widely in the area of GLBTI health and wellbeing policy.

CHASE: Collaborative HIV Art for Social Equity

Kim Davis

CHASE (Collaborative HIV Art for Social Equity) is a dynamic form of activism that targets social inequality through visual art. CHASE enables participants to take control of their art and their lives by creating works that express their feelings and desires. Firmly grounded in community, participants are involved at every level and contribute towards managing projects, developing creative ideas, and producing artworks. The program focuses on issues surrounding HIV, harm reduction, and human rights, and provides technical and artistic advice and expertise to those involved. CHASE supports open dialogue, and aims to raise awareness of social justice issues in communities. It is dedicated to promoting messages of harm reduction in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and dignity and the guarantee of fundamental human rights for those living with the disease. CHASE empowers individuals and groups to advocate on their own behalf.

Biography:

Kim Davis is a visual artist and HIV cross-cultural analyst who in 1997 founded GloballyAware, an HIV arts-led practice. Kim has worked on a diverse range of projects involving people and organisations from around the world. Her efforts enable communities to create art which not only expresses their own experiences of HIV, but conveys messages of harm reduction and the struggle for basic human rights for people living with HIV/AIDS. Kim is currently working on 'The Next Generation: 7 Countries, 7 Paintings' for the International Harm Reduction Association's 2010 conference in Liverpool. Kim's work in 2009 included 'Cremation of Discrimination', a performance installation at ICAAP09; 'Human Rights of HIV Positive Sex Workers', Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers; 'A Drop in the Ocean', National Rural Health Conference, and 'Street Culture', working with street kids. Kim has also undertaken research on 'The Quantity or Quality of HIV Awareness', which includes interviews with people from the HIV affected/infected community. She currently runs a not-for-profit AIDS centre in Bali.