

Master of Science in Narrative Medicine

Illness-Thought-Activism: From HIV/AIDS to COVID-19
Friday, October 2, 9, 16, 23; 2:10-5:00 via zoom
(we will meet for 2 hours the first three weeks and 2.5 hours the last week)

Instructor: Professor Lisa Diedrich Lisa.Diedrich@stonybrook.edu
Office Hours: Mondays 2-4pm via zoom. Please email me to arrange an appointment
Response Policy: Please contact me by email. I will usually reply within 24 hours.



Image description: black background with pink triangle above the words SILENCE = DEATH. This is the art activist collective Gran Fury's iconic graphic image designed for ACT UP (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) in New York in 1987.

Course Overview

This course will explore the conjunction illness-thought-activism in time. In particular, we will focus our investigations on the medical, political, and aesthetic responses to the HIV/AIDS and COVID-19 pandemics. We will use the historical example of the emergence of HIV/AIDS and the increasing politicization of the illness as a lens through which to examine the ongoing contemporary emergence of COVID-19. We will explore how these illnesses are treated in a variety of texts—medical, media, and activist documents, as well as literature, film, comics, and other forms of creative expression. In the most general terms, we are interested in being, doing, and becoming in relation to illness experiences and events, therapeutic thought and practices, and clinical and caring institutions and spaces. We will explore biopolitical issues, including the social determinants of health and structural violence that means some people are at greater risk for illness and premature death than others. Some of our organizing questions for the semester include: why and how is illness political?; what factors impact health?; what constitutes good care?; and how can we better deliver care?

Learning Objectives

I. Identify how knowledge, power, and choice operate in healthcare settings. Give examples of structures that limit the agency of ill people and their caregivers, as well as effective strategies and models of good

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care and healthcare delivery.

2. Analyze scientific, medical, political, and aesthetic responses to illness. Specifically, compare and contrast responses to HIV/AIDS in the 1980s to COVID-19 in 2020.
3. Investigate and critique how different media and genres present stories about health, illness, and health care.
4. Use a variety of methods (including discourse analysis, annotation, visual cultural analysis, and interviewing) to analyze illness different experiences and events of illness.
5. Enhance group communication skills through discussions, small-group work, presentations and debates.

Course Schedule

October 2: Politics of care + introductions

Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *October* Vol. 51 (Winter, 1989), 3-18.

Paul Farmer, "On Suffering and Structural Violence: A View from Below," *Daedalus* Vol. 125, No. 1 (Winter, 1996), 261-283.



Image description: Poster made by the Majority Action Committee of ACT UP with the words **WE DIE— THEY SAY NOTHING!** black block letters in all caps with annotations in brackets next to each word in much smaller font. The poster is also bordered by the phrase "We recognize that every AIDS death is an act of racist, sexist, and homophobic violence" repeated over and over.

October 9: Documenting HIV/AIDS: ACTing UP

DUE: Annotation and comment I

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Selections from the ACT UP Oral History Project (<http://www.actuporalhistory.org>): please watch/read the first three interviews (Robert Vazquez-Pacheco, Moises Agosto, and Gregg Bordowitz) and select at least one more to share with the class.

Also, please explore the ACT UP New York historical website (<https://actupny.org>)

Watch *How to Survive a Plague* (David France, 2012; 110 minutes)

October 16: Drawing HIV/AIDS & COVID-19: Graphic medicine

DUE: Annotation and comment 2

Jaime Cortez's online comic *Sexile* (2004)

MK Czerwiec's graphic memoir *Taking Turns: Stories from HIV/AIDS Care Unit 371* (2017)

Please explore the COVID-19 Comics page on the Graphic Medicine website:

<https://www.graphicmedicine.org/covid-19-comics/>

For further reading, check out: Hillary Chute, "Can Comics Save Your Life?" *Public Books* (August 21, 2020). <https://www.publicbooks.org/can-comics-save-your-life/>

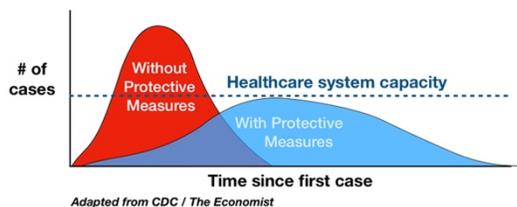


Image description: Flattening the Curve graphic showing the impact of mitigation on the spread of a pandemic. Steep red curve indicates the spread “without protective measure” while flatter blue curve indicates more contained spread “with protective measures.” Original visual data was by Rosamund Pearce for the CDC, adapted by Drew Harris. “The longer it takes the coronavirus to spread to the population, the more time hospitals have to prepare.” <https://www.nytimes.com/article/flatten-curve-coronavirus.html>

October 23: Living with & documenting COVID-19: In real time

DUE: Final Project proposal

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Merlin Chowkwanyun and Adolph Reed, Jr., “Racial Health Disparities and Covid-19—Caution and Context,” *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Accessed at nejm.org on May 6, 2020.

Andrew Liu, “‘Chinese Virus,’ World Market,” *n+1*, March 20, 2020. Accessed at:
<https://nplusonemag.com/online-only/online-only/chinese-virus-world-market/>

Ed Yong, “COVID-19 Can Last for Several Months,” *The Atlantic*, June 4, 2020. Accessed at:
<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2020/06/covid-19-coronavirus-longterm-symptoms-months/612679/>

Also, please explore the Johns Hopkins University & Medicine Coronavirus Resource Center (<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu>)

Resources

Columbia University Information Technology

Columbia University Information Technology (CUIT) provides Columbia University students, faculty and staff with central computing and communications services: <https://cuit.columbia.edu/>. Students, faculty and staff may access University-provided and discounted software downloads at <https://columbiait.onthehub.com>.

Columbia University Library

Columbia’s extensive library system ranks in the top five academic libraries in the nation, with many of its services and resources available online: <http://library.columbia.edu/>.

SPS Academic Resources

The Office of Student Affairs provides students with academic counseling and support services such as online tutoring and career coaching: <http://sps.columbia.edu/student-life-and-alumni-relations/academic-resources>.



Image attribution and description: A page from MK Czerwiec's *Taking Turns* (p. 166). The page depicts the process by which MK creates her first comic. On the left we see MK from behind leaning over a blank white piece of paper. Moving to the right, we see the white paper being filled with boxes and images culminating in a 6-panel comic on the right. Underneath the sequence of panels of panels are thought balloons about making a comic about being sad.

I. Annotation as method of verbal and visual analysis (50)

Annotations (20 points x 2): In preparation for our discussions on Documenting HIV/AIDS on October 9 and 16, students will post an annotation on Canvas. For the meeting on October 9 on ACTing Up, students will annotate an ACT UP poster. This means you will make notes on and about the poster, describing in detail the verbal and visual effects of the poster (see more detail on how to annotate below). Some questions to consider: What are the images, colors, words? What is the composition of the poster? How is the viewer drawn to the poster and how are they meant to read it? Who is the audience? What is the tone? What is the message? What was the context for the demonstration at which the poster was used?

For the meeting on October 16 on graphic medicine, students will post another annotation on Canvas. This time, students will choose a panel or page from one of the graphic narratives we will read for this week. Tell us what is happening in the page/panel you have chosen. Describe the page/panel in detail, emphasizing what it shows and how it shows it. Interpret the significance of the page/panel in relation to the text as a whole. Is it a continuation of a theme? Does it do something different formally? Provide two discussion questions that will help generate a conversation about the reading.

How to annotate: Generally, we annotate by writing directly on a text or image. Because our discussion will be virtual not in-person, students are not required to write directly on the image. What you will do instead is a two-part process—note taking and interpretation. First, you will study the image carefully. You will take notes on what you see and feel as you look at the image.

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This is descriptive work. Describe the image in detail. These notes do not need to be full sentences or paragraphs. You will want to look and look again. That is, don't simply look and take notes in one sitting, but spend time studying, then do something else for a period of time (sleep on it, go for a walk, watch a film, listen to music), and return later to look again.

After you feel like you have fully annotated or described the image, then give us some thoughts on what ideas or feelings the image is attempting to show. In a short paragraph (3 or 4 sentences), interpret the image.

You will post both your notes on and your interpretation of the image.

Annotations will be posted to Canvas by 6 pm on Thursday October 8 and 15.

Comments (5 points x 2): In addition to your annotations, you are expected to post a comment (50-100 words) on a posting by a classmate. (This is the minimum requirement. You should feel free to engage more!) Your comments should be analytical and thoughtful, not simply "I agree with so and so" but why you agree/disagree. You should also read all the annotations by your classmates—this will help you understand the readings better—different people notice and focus on different things. We learn more from each other than we do on our own.

2. Documenting COVID-19 project (40): three options—choose one!

1. Interview: Students will conduct a 30-minute interview with a person about their experiences with COVID-19. You may interview someone you know (including family members) or someone you don't already know but who has a particular experience of the pandemic that you would like to learn about. Students will transcribe the interview and also write a 2-page reaction to the interview process.

2. Comic: Students will create a comic about COVID-19. This could document a personal experience or that of someone you know; it could be the experiences of healthcare or other essential workers; about how and why the virus spreads and how to slow the spread; or about the racial, sexual, and class politics of COVID-19. The comic must be at least 4 panels. Students will write a 2-page artist's statement discussing their comic.

3. Public health or illness politics poster or meme: Students will create their own public health or illness politics graphic poster or meme. Students will write a 2-page artist's statement discussing their poster or meme.

Project proposals (1-page) are due by email before class on October 23. Please explain which project you intend to do, along with a rationale for your project. For the interview project, you will explain who you are interviewing and why, and submit 10 questions that will help frame your interview. For the comics project, describe the experience your comic will document and explain why you think this experience is important to document in this form. For the public health or illness politics poster or meme, describe the message that you want to communicate and why and how you plan to do so.

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Final projects will be turned in by email on November 13.

3. Participation (10) You are expected to complete all assigned readings, attend all class sessions, and engage with others in online discussions. You are required to be ready to discuss those readings with questions, comments, and criticisms. Some of the readings will be difficult: spend time reading carefully and thinking critically about what you have read! One way to engage in discussion is to bring up specific passages in the text that are interesting, confusing, provocative, etc. Take notes during class. Engage in discussions on Canvas.

Evaluation/Grading

The final grade will be calculated as described below:

FINAL GRADING SCALE

Grade	Percentage	ASSIGNMENT	% Weight
A+	98–100 %	Annotation as method of verbal & visual analysis	2x20 = 40%
A	93–97.9 %	Comments on annotations	2x5 = 10%
A-	90–92.9 %	Documenting COVID-19 Project	40%
B+	87–89.9 %	Participation	10%
B	83–86.9 %		
B-	80–82.9 %		
C+	77–79.9 %		
C	73–76.9 %		
C-	70–72.9 %		
D	60–69.9 %		
F	59.9% and below		

Course Policies

On studying illness in a pandemic

I know these are incredibly challenging times. New York has been one epicenter of a pandemic that is not over. We have also witnessed the horrific killing of George Floyd, and many of us have participated in the protests against police violence that erupted in New York and all over the world. These are not ordinary times and many instructors, including me, have had to adapt from in-person to remote learning. I firmly believe this is the safest and most accessible way to learn at the present time. I know that many of you are pleased to be able to take your classes online; some less so. I am committed to working together to create a flexible and inclusive space for learning that takes seriously one of the themes of the class: the need to think creatively about our practices of healing and spaces of care. This includes the online space in which we will study illness and illness politics in a pandemic. Feel free to reach out to me should you have concerns as we take on a difficult topic at a difficult time.

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I understand that people have different ways of taking in conversation and information. We will spend 2 hours together on zoom and I know this modality can be exhausting. You should all feel free to get up, stretch, move around or not! Also, everyone is free to turn their camera off should they need to deal with something in your local environment.

Late work

All assignments have due dates outlined in the schedule above. If, for some reason, you cannot meet a particular deadline, you will have the option of turning in late assignments for partial credit. Please contact me by email if you cannot meet a deadline, so we can discuss when and how you can complete the assignment.

School Policies

Copyright Policy

Please note—Due to copyright restrictions, online access to this material is limited to instructors and students currently registered for this course. Please be advised that by clicking the link to the electronic materials in this course, you have read and accept the following:

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

Academic Integrity

Columbia University expects its students to act with honesty and propriety at all times and to respect the rights of others. It is fundamental University policy that academic dishonesty in any guise or personal conduct of any sort that disrupts the life of the University or denigrates or endangers members of the University community is unacceptable and will be dealt with severely. It is essential to the academic integrity and vitality of this community that individuals do their own work and properly acknowledge the circumstances, ideas, sources, and assistance upon which that work is based. Academic honesty in class assignments and exams is expected of all students at all times.

SPS holds each member of its community responsible for understanding and abiding by the SPS Academic Integrity and Community Standards posted at <http://sps.columbia.edu/student-life-and-alumni-relations/academic-integrity-and-community-standards>. You are required to read these standards within the first few days of class. Ignorance of the School's policy concerning academic dishonesty shall not be a defense in any disciplinary proceedings.

Accessibility

Columbia is committed to providing equal access to qualified students with documented disabilities. A student's disability status and reasonable accommodations are individually determined based upon disability documentation and related information gathered through the intake process. For more

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information regarding this service, please visit the University's Health Services website:

<http://health.columbia.edu/services/ods/support>.

Questions? Please use the general Discussion Board thread for course and technology questions. If you would like to meet with me over zoom to discuss the questions or concerns about your progress or performance in the course, then please email me and we will set up a meeting on zoom.

Keep the conversation going, use our course hashtag: #IllnessThoughtActivism. I will use this hashtag on Twitter to post articles and commentary related to course themes. Students are encouraged to do the same on Twitter, Instagram, and other social media. If you come across a new hashtag relevant to the class, please share on Sharing Discussion Board thread.