

Initially when I started writing my thesis, my intent was to reflect on my personal experience and the way in which my diagnosis challenged my own perception of the collective use of language, specifically with the word positive. In the thesis, I explored the dichotomy of individual and collective construction of word-meaning in the term “positive” in reference to its HIV and psychological positivity denotations and its relation to the internet and Postmodern, more specifically, liquid modernity capitalism. I wanted to dive deeper into the disconnection in perception between myself and what started to appear to me as an arbitrary, exclusionary, foreign, manipulative, manufactured social lexicon. It was that perceptual connotative gap, that crisis of meaning between my experience and the collective use of language that gave rise to my thesis.

However, throughout the study and writing of the AIDS epidemic in America in my thesis, I could not avoid thinking about the global parallelisms and connecting dots between the AIDS crisis and our current crisis, the COVID-19 epidemic. Speaking about the crisis of meaning and gaps in perception of reality; the AIDS crisis according to scholar Paula Treichler constituted a crisis of meaning. Biomedical authority fabricated assumptions deemed as medical facts, leading to the belief that heterosexual people were immune to AIDS. Through the use of gendered language in medical reports such as “rugged vagina prevents the virus from entering”, it transformed the social perception about AIDS that only served to pathologize gay men and perpetuate unsafe sex across straight cis couples. Looking at the COVID-19, we can observe in different levels, similarities in the prevalence of speculation in the biomedical field. The initial scientific theory attributed the start of Covid-19 to the human consumption of the pangolin meat, however, later on this April, French Nobel prize virologist Luc Montaigner asserted that the virus was fabricated in a laboratory in Wuhan; which was automatically disqualified two days later by French scientists. Food-related speculative theories have had severe impacts on Chinese

restaurants outside of China where customers feared contagion over eating Chinese food. On top of that, the president of the United States has constantly referred to COVID-19 as the “Chinese virus” further stigmatizing and pathologizing Chinese and Asian populations as a whole, increasing harassment and brutal xenophobic attacks. The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus denounced Trump’s terminology as dangerous to Asian Americans. In fact, the WHO has been alerting on the impacts of using a particular kind of language surrounding the coronavirus and its origins. In Dr. Mike Ryan’s words, the Executive Director of the WHO Health Emergencies Program, “lest it lead to the profiling of individuals associated with the virus.” As presented in my thesis, the use of stigmatizing language used to refer to patients of a virus or to those affected by pandemics can have severe impacts on the social perception of said populations. Back in 1983, a group of AIDS activists in New York created the Denver Principles, advocating for people's first language, asking to detach the human from their illness or pathology and creating massive changes in the terminology we use to refer to HIV and AIDS patients; for example substituting HIV carrier to people living with HIV.

Another similarity with the AIDS crisis is the illusion of immunity against the virus. While at the beginning of the AIDS crisis there was a belief that only gay men were targets to catching AIDS even supported by biomedical sources; at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic there was a certain dismissal or minimization as it only largely affected or had terrible impacts on risk groups: elderly populations and patients with previous pathologies. However, we have learned that nobody is fully immune to any of these viruses. Nevertheless, what it has not changed in any case were the racist, ableist, and elitist systems in place that have significantly shaped the effects of both the AIDS and Covid-19 pandemics. Black people have died disproportionately at larger rates in the United States, they only make up 13% of the US population and constitute a 30% in patients of coronavirus. Similarly, in a study conducted by the Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention in 2018, African Americans make up 42% of the population living with HIV in the United States.

Finally, it is important to point out the militarization of language used to refer to COVID-19 such as “fight”, “war”, “we are in this together” and the consequences it is having when it comes to national policies such as the close of borders and ban on immigration, and even the control and surveillance of populations pushing to sacrifice privacy over safety. In a state of exception, fear overrules reason, safety overrules morality and chaos favors power. Now more than ever, in a highly sophisticated cyber-capitalist liquid age, digitised control mechanisms are breaking down the barriers between private and public life and between authoritarianism and freedom. In a time of chaos, the fear of death and the entertainment of the moment blinds us to the broader political and social frame. What other bills are being passed in Congress right now using the turmoil of the pandemic? How is it that people were still obligated to vote in person in Wisconsin in the midst of a pandemic, forced to choose between democracy and safety? Is the crisis forcing governments across the world to execute restrictive, polemic measures of control and vigilance, or was just the crisis the perfect timing to put them in place? Is the pandemic creating an economic crisis or it is only exposing the necropolitics of Western countries and the holes of capitalism? In my opinion, the pandemic is going to push global economics into a further digitised non-material form of capitalism where power can become more dangerous and intangible, yet, this might be the time where we should seek alternative strategies of social organization to hack the internet; this is the time of breakout and liminality that might be as well the time of observation and social awareness to direct, organize and guide the social and political changes we want.

Remember, crises are not only factual crises, they are also crises of meaning.