

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Breaking Stigma and Dispelling Invisibility: Animated Languages for Communicating HIV Disease

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ISSN 2496-1868



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Abstract: Numerous chronic diseases do not involve particular aesthetic indications and, for this reason, are considered "invisible". These diseases represent a large percentage of current ailments and people affected by them tend not to reveal their pathology, because it is stigmatizing. In recent years there has been a significant increase in social campaigns that have made great use of audio-visual artefacts, produced with the aim of educating, informing, raising awareness and giving to patients the possibility of emerging from invisibility. The article aims to focus on communication strategies using animated artefacts to dispel the invisibility of HIV, a virus considered deadly until the early 90s and which still today causes stigma, shame and desire for invisibility for those affected. Non-profit organizations and independent directors have worked on animation projects aimed at conducting information and awareness-raising actions, at suggesting avoiding risky behaviours, and at helping those affected escape from social isolation in which stigma and prejudice have confined them. These projects will be, therefore, selected, sorted and analysed according to the adopted different graphic languages and narrative approaches. The analysis considers the eight categories of communication styles formulated in 2008 by Roberto Bernocchi in the study of the communication artefacts produced as a tool for social awareness, and seeks to identify the linguistic and stylistic most adopted approaches in animated products that deal with the stigma of HIV and AIDS.

Keywords: Animation; Communication strategies; Invisible diseases; HIV; Stigma; Social awareness.

1. Introduction: invisible diseases

According to the World Health Organization, invisible diseases represent the major cause of death globally, and one of the main health and psychological challenges of the 21st century (World Health Organization, 2018: 10). These conditions have a double dimension of invisibility, as they do not show obvious symptoms or physical manifestations – they are invisible to the gaze of others – and, for those affected, they can lead to feelings of isolation and a desire to remain unseen. Epilepsy, cancer, HIV, diabetes, endometriosis, to name a few, are generally not visible but extremely painful for those affected, who often carry a heavy burden of shame and social stigma.

The psychiatrist Donald Nathanson in 1990s proposed a model named “The Compass of Shame” in which he synthesized the possible different responses for defending against shame and stigma, which will depend on the situation and the individual’s personal style (1992: 30). In Nathanson’s theory social isolation and avoidance are among the most common strategies engaged to handle shame especially when the shame is caused by health conditions (Ibid.). This idea has been expanded by the English psychologist Christiane Sanderson who argued that shame over a medical condition is an emotion strongly influenced by social discrimination that mistakenly associates the state of illness with behaviours judged far from decorous or with a specific sexual gender (Sanderson, 2015: 107). In Sanderson opinion shame develops more often if a socially “execrable” disease such as AIDS or sexually transmitted diseases is involved.

Stemming from this premises this article focuses on the use of animation and motion design to dispel the invisibility of a specific disease, AIDS, and the virus that causes it, HIV, – considered deadly until the early 90s – that does not involve particular aesthetic indications and, for this reason, can be considered “invisible”, and which still today causes stigma, shame and desire for invisibility for those affected (Kennedy and Vader, 2017).

A selection of animated artifacts produced within communication campaigns developed by public or private institutions from different countries will be selected, classified and analysed from both a technical, aesthetic and linguistic perspectives, considering the communication styles, the different graphic languages and narrative approaches that take advantage of animation power to pursue a social agenda.

2. Animation social agenda: a quick overview

Since the 1970s, communication artifacts with a focus on social responsibility have emerged as a significant contribution for driving positive transformations in social, economic, political, and environmental domains (Papanek, 1971; Heller and Vienne, 2003). Historically, these issues have been primarily addressed through traditional media, such as print journals, posters, and television advertisements – collectively referred to as “progress advertising” (Gabardi, 2011). However, the emergence of the internet and social media has introduced a wide array of communication technologies, channels and languages. New media and platforms have revealed to be particularly appealing to a broad audience, conveying a variety of messages highly effectively (Bernocchi et al., 2018). Some of these messages have been delivered making great use of animated artefacts, produced with the aim of educating, informing, raising awareness and engaging the viewer through different graphic languages, narrative approaches and media platforms, including television, cinema, social media, and the web (Lonardi and Fraccaroli, 2021). Animation, due to its pervasiveness and cross media adaptability (Buchan, 2013) can be efficiently tailored to deal with different messages and subjects, and to tell visually compelling stories that provoke strong emotional responses. Animated artefacts offer a clear, concise explanation of issues, alleviating viewers’ concerns while offering a forward-looking perspective and fostering a deep emotional connection (Normoyle, 2019; Uhrig, 2019). In this scenario, the use of animation in social advertising has become a pivotal tool even for ministerial communication, non-profit organizations and NGOs (Panadisi and Maselli, 2024). The visual language of animation allows these organizations to immediately capture the audience’s attention, evoke strong

emotions, and encourage further engagement with the addressed topic (Waters and Jones, 2011).

A significant number of animated videos have been produced in recent years to address social and environmental issues. Among the most well-known animated campaigns, it's possible to mention *The clock is ticking*, a motion graphic video made by the organization GirlEffect.org in 2009. In the video moving typographic element and animated signs explain that, at the age of twelve, girls in developing countries risk getting caught in a cycle of poverty, due to the lack of economic opportunities, diseases, pregnancy and other factors. The 3D animation *One human family, food for all* (2015), created by the Eallin animation studio for Caritas International, is based on an ancient story about hunger and sharing. A circle of people tries to feed themselves from a cauldron using a very long spoon which allow to take the food but not to bring it to the mouth; after a phase of tension in which the diners compete for the dish, the fall of a spoon leads to a gesture of solidarity in which everyone contributes to feed one person at a time. Another good example is the campaign developed by Childline with the stop motion short film *Nobody is normal* (2020). The film tells the story of a boy-monster who tries to hide himself behind a mask and some "normal" clothes he wears for school, before realizing that all his apparently "normal" colleagues also turn out to be monster-guys and, however much he may feel alone and misunderstood, he is not really alone, because deep down no one is normal.

On the environmental awareness front, a powerful example of an animated video made for the NGO Greenpeace is *Turtle Journey* (2020), produced by Aardman Animations. It is a poignant stop-motion short film that sheds light on the urgent environmental crises threatening the world's oceans. The film follows a family of turtles navigating their way through a hazardous and increasingly devastated marine environment. As they swim through the ocean, the background reveals distressing signs of human-caused destruction: plastic pollution, oil drilling, and overfishing, all exacerbated by climate change. The film's climax occurs when the family finally comprehends the gravity of the damage, but by then, it's tragically too late. Aforementioned animated works utilize various narrative and visual strategies to communicate the values and concerns of non-profit organizations in a visually compelling and effective manner (Alam, 2022). The next sections will focus on communication strategies that have utilized animation power to address HIV and AIDS' social and health related issues.

3. AIDS: Stigma and (dis)information

Just over 30 years ago the world discovered the existence of a terrible new disease: AIDS. The media talked about it, sometimes even with nonsensical statements, such as the "gay syndrome" or the "gay cancer" (*Le Figaro*, 1982, in Lestienne, 2021). The reaction of the institutions was very different from country to country and sometimes very slow (Swenson, 1988). HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. If HIV is not treated, it can lead to AIDS. HIV is a sexually transmitted infection and can also be spread by contact with infected blood and from drug use or sharing needles. There is currently no cure. Once people get HIV, they have it for life. But with proper medical care, HIV can be controlled. People with HIV who get effective treatment can live long, healthy lives and protect their partners.

Stigma and discrimination associated with HIV/AIDS are viewed as one of the greatest challenges for HIV infection and the communication strategies experimented worldwide have had a high responsibility from a social perspective (Gabardi, 2011). HIV-infected people are considered still

today socially unacceptable, unpleasantly different from the public and even a threat for other people, therefore treated unequally and unfairly and often subjected to isolation, rejection and blame (Castro et al., 2010). The lack of information and awareness combined with outdated beliefs lead people to fear getting HIV. Many wrong ideas about HIV come from the HIV images that first appeared in the early 1990s (Swenson, 1988) (Figure 1). There are still misconceptions about how HIV is transmitted and what it means to live with HIV today. This stigma seriously affects people with HIV, and it may force the infected people to delay or refuse treatment or hide their disease from others. The fear from stigma causes denial, secrecy, depression and shame.

In the last decades both non-profit organizations and independent activists have worked on projects dedicated to the communication of this stigmatizing disease through social media campaigns aiming at improving the life-conditions of those affected by the virus both on a social level, by disproving some misconceptions, and on a medical level, by promoting correct behaviours to prevent or treat the virus (Gabardi, 2017). In the following section audiovisual artifacts and awareness campaigns that used animation to inform, sensitize and arouse emotions will be explored and classified according to the communication styles identified by the Italian sociologist Roberto Bernocchi in 2008.



Figure 1. *Dying on AIDS* (1992). Bill-board advertisement designed by Oliviero Toscani © Benetton

4. Animated videos for AIDS

4.1. Criteria of selection and categories

Among the several awareness campaigns against AIDS led by NGOs and organizations in the last decades a few of them have made use of animation. By delving into the archives of these organization and consulting bibliographical references that have reconstructed the evolution of social communication of HIV and other socially stigmatized conditions – such as the books *Stop Aids* (2017) and *Social Advertising* (2011) by Emanuele Gabardi – it has been possible to identify twenty-nine animated artifacts addressing AIDS and HIV from different perspectives for social purposes. An interesting finding emerged from the scouting, i.e. the presence of several

awareness raising videos produced or co-produced by those same foundations and international organizations not belonging to any specific transmedia and cross media campaigns. Due to this observation the analysis has required to separate artefacts belonging to communication campaigns from standalone videos dealing with the same social issues as independent productions.

In the next section the collected case studies will be classified according to the list of communication languages and styles formulated for the first time in 2008 by the Italian sociologist Roberto Bernocchi,¹ who named and described the following categories: sentimental, reassuring, dramatic, accusatory, transgressive, humorous, paternalistic, and informative. The sociologist defines as “sentimental and moving” artifacts that show helpless people, caught in moments of difficulty or suffering, and that stage images and narratives that tend to move; “reassuring and positive” are those artifacts that address the issued problem in a light way, to play down the drama, making people understand that a better, positive future lies ahead; “dramatic” are the communication artifacts that get advantage of the “fear arousing appeal”, and provoke a reminder of fear through anxiety-provoking and highly dramatic images; “accusatory and denouncing” are those that stimulate a sense of guilt in people, shake them from apathy and lack of interest; similarly, “provocative and transgressive” ones stimulate a strong emotional reaction by arousing feelings of guilt through shocking or very harsh images; “ironic” are those artefacts that use explicit humorous figures, which raise a smile; “paternalistic and prescriptive” artifacts aim to make people responsible, avoiding dramatic tones, rather placing themselves almost at the level of an educator; finally the “Informative and documentary” ones aim to inform in a didactic way, without raising emotions (see Bernocchi, 2008: 165-186).

4.2. Sorting and classification

The twenty-nine selected films consist of eighteen animations belonging to nine awareness campaigns and eleven animated awareness videos that have used animation as their primary technique and communication language. In Figure 2 these videos have been inserted in a timeline that orders them in chronological order (year of production). Starting from the first identified animated video, produced in 2000 for the awareness campaign of the Italian Ministry of Health that featured the characters from Guido Silvestri (aka Silver)’s cartoons Lupo Alberto² and the mole Enrico, the films, the campaigns and the associations that funded these productions can be listed as follows:

- the video of Lupo Alberto produced by the Ministry of Health in 2000 as part of the sixth ministerial awareness campaign;

¹ Bernocchi categories root in the attempts of formulation of communication strategies that has enthused scholars in the fields of media studies and advertising since the 1980s. The first classifications have been provided by Jasjit Singh Johar and Joseph Sirgy (1991) and by John R. Rossiter and Larry Percy (1987), who identified two macro-categories: “Informational advertising”, which refers to appeals entrusted by facts, useful information and functional aspects of the products/services they communicate, and “Transformational advertising”, that evokes positive (or negative) emotions (Cadet et al. 2017). Marketing and advertising researchers have progressively distinguished communication models between messages capable of eliciting positive and negative emotions (Brennan, 2010; Higgins 1997), and strategies that leverage the persuasive power of humour (Mukherjee, 2012; Yoon, 2013) and the evocative power of images (Gallopel-Morvan, 2009).

² Lupo Alberto was the protagonist of a controversial pamphlet on AIDS distributed in schools, which was censored by the Italian Minister of Public Education Rosa Russo Jervolino. The 2000 Campaign, instead, included four posters and a 15-minutes video, which was soon censored and is now untraceable, except from the descriptions provided by some bibliographical sources (Bernocchi and Sorbero, 2011: 199; Gabardi, 2017: 31).

- a video produced by Médecins Sans Frontières for the MSF Campaign in 2012;
- a video produced for the Nucleus Medical Media Campaign 2013;
- a video produced for the AIDS Prevention Platform Campaign 2018;
- a video for the “Magari Fosse un gioco” Campaign by NPS Italia in 2020;
- 10 videos produced by high school students for the #HIVSTOPTHEVIRUS Campaign (2020) and #cHIVuoleonoscere Campaign (2021) promoted by Gilead Sciences;
- a video produced for the AID FOR AIDS 2022 Campaign by the communication agency Satchi & Satchi;
- a video produced for the "Have Fun But Play Safe" Campaign 2023 by Creativa's Innovative.

The identified awareness videos produced by organizations and associations but not linked to specific awareness campaigns are eleven:

- five videos produced by the French non-profit organization AIDES between 2005 and 2011;
- the video “How HIV is treated” produced by Body and Soul Charity in 2014;
- a video produced by NPS Italia (2016);
- a music video produced by Mercury Phoenix Trust in 2019;
- a video produced by ITPC Global in 2020;
- two videos produced by ViiV Healthchare in 2020 and 2022.
-

Afterwards, the selected artefacts have been categorized according to the communication styles identified by Roberto Bernocchi (see previous section). Animation's versatility allows for a broad spectrum of styles, from emotional and dramatic storytelling to humorous and light-hearted narratives, each tailored to reach specific audiences and achieve distinct communication objectives. By classifying these animated campaigns and videos based on Bernocchi's styles, it is possible to gain a better understanding of how different tones and approaches are utilized to inform, educate, dispel myths, and foster understanding about HIV and AIDS. Among the animated videos identified, none could be classified under the categories of "transgressive" or "paternalistic", and the categories “dramatic” and “denouncing” have been merged in one category, as the selected videos belonging to this category stimulate a sense of guilt by showcasing highly dramatic images. The absent categories suggest that certain communication styles may be less suited to animation or, alternatively, that those creating animated content for HIV and AIDS awareness may prefer more supportive, engaging, and informative approaches. In Figure 2 the five remaining categories have been associated with a specific colour value. The classification result is the following:

- The category of videos classified as “reassuring/positive” has been associated with green, and this category includes the video of Lupo Alberto produced in 2000 by the Italian Ministry of Health, two videos produced by students for the #HIVSTOPTHEVIRUS Campaign in 2020, two produced by students for the #cHIVuoleonoscere Campaign in 2021, and the animated short film “The Story” produced for the AID FOR AIDS/AID FOR LIFE campaign by Satchi & Satchi in 2022;

- the “funny/ironic” category has been associated with yellow, and in this category were classified the videos BABY BABY (2005), SUGAR BABY LOVE (2007), LOVE STORY (2008), ZIZI GRSFFITI (2010), SMUTLEY (2011) produced by the French non-profit organization AIDES, the video of the “Magari Fosse un gioco” Campaign (2020) by NPS Italia, and one of the videos produced by the students for the #cHIVuoleonoscere Campaign of 2021;
- the “dramatic/denouncing” type (result of the blend between Bernocchi’s “dramatic” and “accusatory” categories) was associated with the colour red and two videos belonging to this category were identified: the video “Human Ball” produced by the Médecins Sans Frontières MSF Campaign of 2012, and one of the videos produced by students for the #cHIVuoleonoscere Campaign of 2021;
- the “Informative/documentary” category, the largest, has been associated with indigo, and the videos that fall into this category are very different between each other for style, technique, narrative approach and graphic quality: the scientific 3D CGI film produced for the Nucleus Medical Media campaign in 2013, the informative video “How HIV is treated” produced by Body and Soul Charity in 2014, the infographic animation “10 things to know about HIV” produced in 2016 by NPS Italia, the typographic animation created for the AIDS Prevention Platform Campaign in 2018, the scientific motion graphics “Understanding UIV” by ITPC (2020), two videos produced by students for the #cHIVuoleonoscere campaign in 2021, the two character animation videos “THE CD4 STORY” and “Approach to HIV” designed by ViiV Healthcare respectively in 2020 and 2022, and finally the video produced for the “Have Fun But Play Safe” Campaign 2023 by Creativa's Innovative;
- the “sentimental/moving” category, associated with the colour petrol, has three videos: the animated video clip “Love me like there’s no tomorrow” produced by Mercury Phoenix Trust (2019) and two animations produced by students for the #HIVSTOPTHEVIRUS Campaign of 2020. As anticipated, selected animations show very heterogeneous visual languages, techniques and graphic styles, and as an example in the next section a film will be described for each of the categories of communication styles identified.

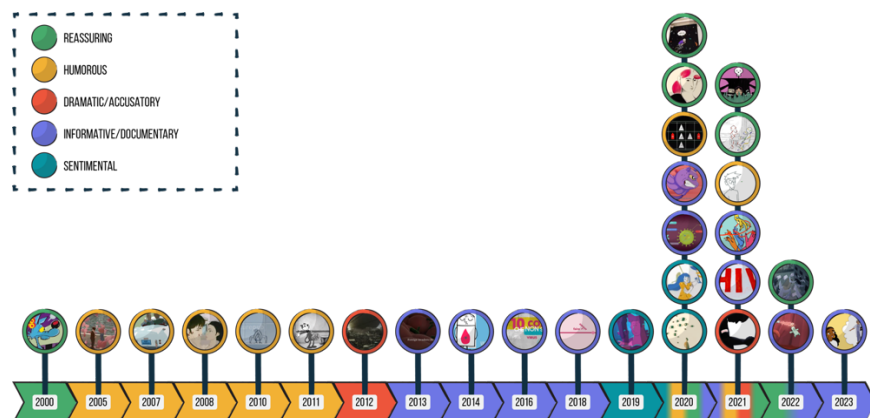


Figure 2. Animated videos on AIDS and HIV designed by NGOs and private organizations between 2000 and 2023 and classified according to the production year and the communication style © Maselli

5. Analysis of selected case studies

5.1. The Story (AID FOR AIDS / AID FOR LIFE, 2021) [reassuring/positive]

The short film "The Story," produced for the AID FOR AIDS/AID FOR LIFE campaign by Saatchi & Saatchi in 2021, combines effective technical elements and a delicate but powerful communicative tone to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS societal impact. The film tells a story of hope, optimism, and determination, highlighting the achievements obtained by AID FOR AIDS / AID FOR LIFE to go to get help where it is needed. The Saatchi team chose to tell this story through animation to emphasize the dove, AID FOR AIDS' logo, but also to discuss a complicated topic in an "easily digestible" way to evoke understanding and appreciation from the viewer.

Technically, the short film employs a minimalist yet visually impactful approach, using a flat digital 2D animation with rough drawings and imprecise lines, emphasizing the human aspect of the narrative, and allowing the audience to connect on an emotional level. The colour choices reflect moments of joy and optimism (with light and pastel colours), and moments of despair and difficulty (with shady colours and a dark atmosphere), reinforcing the emotiveness of the stories being told (Figure 3). The tone of the communication is heartfelt, empathetic, and hopeful. It emphasizes the difficulties in receive medical support and the resilience of people living with a disease and underscores the importance of empathy and support from the community. The message "help always finds a way" is emphasized by the story using a metaphor: a dove must deliver the medicine to a children's hospital but is hindered by a cat symbolizing the social stigma and prejudice, which very often affect the choices and serenity of leading a normal life for those affected by HIV/aids. The animal manages to overcome the obstacle thanks to the collaboration of the community (Figure 4). The storytelling approach, therefore, is designed to metaphorically break down barriers of stigma, offering a human perspective rather than focusing solely on statistics or medical information. However, the virus is never mentioned apart from the final message that declare that AID FOR AIDS has helped more than 20,000 people in 70 developing countries and the used visual language is generic and relatable, ensuring that the message is accessible to a broad audience.



Figures 3-4. *The Story* (Saatchi & Saatchi, 2021). Screen captures © AID FOR AIDS/AID FOR LIFE

5.2. Love Me Like There's No Tomorrow (The Mercury Phoenix Trust, 2019) [sentimental/moving]

In 2019, the two directors Esteban Bravo and Beth David released a four-minute animated music video commemorating the Queen frontman twenty-eight years after his death, accompanying his 1985 song "Love Me Like There's No Tomorrow". The video uses a blend of emotional storytelling and stylized animation to communicate a poignant message about love, acceptance, and the fight against AIDS, adopting a "microscopic" perspective. The images speak metaphorically of the strength of human solidarity by telling the love story between two anthropomorphic white blood cells, one of which is affected by the virus, using their relationship to symbolize the universal nature of love and the challenges faced by those affected by HIV (Figure 5). The storytelling is nuanced, capturing both the euphoria of love and the heartbreak of struggle, ultimately leading to a hopeful resolution. The directors focus heavily on visual metaphor and symbolism. For instance, the portrayal of the virus is represented abstractly, allowing viewers to understand the struggle without being overly literal (Figure 6).

From a technical perspective, the animation employs a vibrant, hand-drawn style reminiscent of classic 2D cartoons, which evokes a sense of nostalgia and warmth. The characters are depicted with expressive features, allowing for a deep emotional connection with the audience despite the absence of dialogue. The colour palette shifts throughout the video, reflecting the emotional journey of the protagonists – from warm, bright tones that symbolize joy and love to darker, muted shades that convey moments of tension and uncertainty. The tone of the communication is both tender and hopeful. By using animation, the video manages to address a serious topic in an accessible and profound way, encouraging empathy and understanding without resorting to fear or stigma, and emphasizes the emotional dimension of scientific communication, spotlighting the need for welcome, acceptance and humanity.



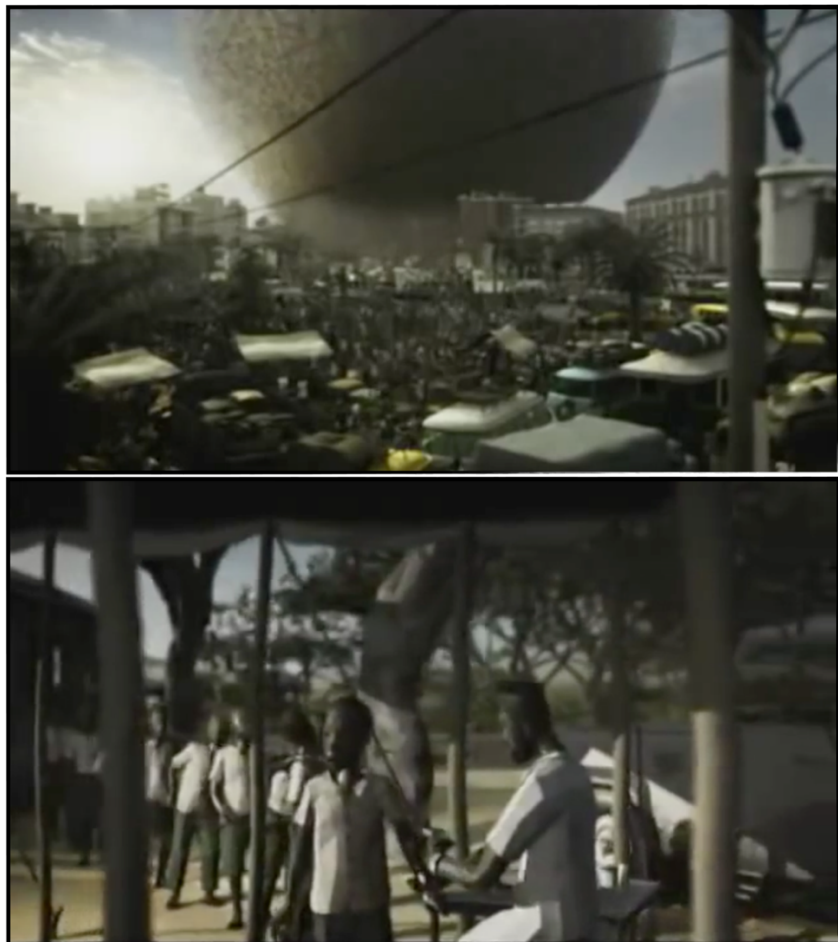
Figures 5-6. *Love Me Like There's No Tomorrow* (Universal Music Group, 2019). Screen captures © The Mercury Phoenix Trust

5.3. Human Ball (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2012) [dramatic/denouncing]

The animation "Human Ball," produced in 2012 for the Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Campaign, uses impactful visual storytelling to raise awareness about the urgency of humanitarian help and the challenges of fighting the AIDS epidemic in developing countries. The animation conveys

a dramatic social situation through strong imagery and symbolic elements, designed to raise awareness about the impact of AIDS and the importance of accessible treatment.

In an African country a man is walking when he suddenly falls to the ground and drags other people with him. As it rolls, a dark ball is formed and, as it travels, destroys a village and other innocent people, growing exponentially (Figure 7). When it arrives in a city it is now a giant-sized sphere, a metaphor for the spread of the disease on the African continent. The narrative is highly metaphorical, portraying human figures being tossed around like a ball in a chaotic and relentless environment. This symbolizes the lack of control and agency, stressing the urgency of support and advocacy for those in need. Technically, the video produced in 3D CGI uses a simple yet striking animation style. The characters are depicted as faceless figures, which helps convey the invisibility and dehumanization often experienced by people affected by AIDS (Figure 8).



Figures 7-8. *Human Ball* (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2012). Screen captures © MSF

The animation employs a limited colour palette, primarily using muted tones such as greys and browns, which contribute to create an oppressive atmosphere. The tone of the communication is dramatic, shocking, and thought-provoking. By using metaphorical imagery, the video denounces a humanitarian urgency and encourages viewers to see the reality behind the statistics, invoking empathy and highlighting the necessity of intervention. The storytelling and animation choices create a powerful and direct

message, urging action and support for those in need of medical care and protection.

5.4. Zizi Graffiti (AIDES, 2010) [ironic/irreverent]

The fact that the transmission of the virus occurs mainly through sexual intercourse constitutes the stimulus for the use of explicit humorous figures, which raise a smile. The animation *Zizi Graffiti*, produced in 2010 by AIDES, a French association working to prevent the spread of HIV and viral hepatitis, uses humour animation to promote safe sex and raise awareness about HIV prevention. The protagonist of the short film is a penis, Zizi, drawn inside a public toilet. Every time he approaches the drawings representing female organs, they run away in fear (Figure 9). Very demoralized, Zizi walks over to the sinks. Here he sees a girl who, with the pencil with which she was applying make-up, draws the outlines of a condom for him. At this point Zizi, now protected, becomes the object of desire of all the female graffiti around him (Figure 10). The short video focuses on promoting safe sex through humour, using playful and irreverent scenarios involving animated characters, with the aim to normalize conversations around sexuality and condom use, to reduce stigma and encourage positive sexual health behaviours, especially among younger audiences.

The animation has a cartoonish and exaggerated style. The visuals are lively, featuring fluid character movements that convey a sense of energy and humour. The characters are highly stylized and depicted in an over-the-top manner, which adds an element of fun and lightness to a topic that is often considered difficult or uncomfortable. The tone of the communication is light-hearted, direct, and playful, effectively breaking down barriers to discussing sexual health openly. By combining humour with clear messaging about condom use, *Zizi Graffiti* delivers a serious message about HIV prevention in an approachable and entertaining way, ultimately aiming to promote safer sex practices.



Figures 9-10. *Zizi Graffiti* (TWBA, 2010). Screen captures © AIDES

5.5. Understanding HIV and its Treatment (ITPC, 2020) [informative/documentary]

Informative and documentary communication style includes videos that aim to inform in a didactic way, without raising emotions, through different animation techniques and tones of voice, from motion graphics to videos that "humanize" the microorganisms of the human body. Selected case study is the motion graphic video *Understanding HIV and its Treatment*, produced in 2020 by the International Treatment Preparedness Coalition (ITPC), based in Botswana.

The video describes in an understandable but precise language and with flat graphics combined with moving typographic elements the ways in which the HIV virus spreads in the human body and how antiretroviral therapies reduce HIV reproduction by interrupting the virus life cycle. The technical, linguistic, and aesthetic elements are designed to inform and make complex medical information accessible. Technically, the video features moving icons, infographics, and text overlays that break down information into easily understandable parts (Figure 11). The use of bright, contrasting colours is effective in guiding the viewer's attention and maintaining engagement. The visual style is minimalist yet vibrant, avoiding overwhelming detail to keep the focus on key messages. Linguistically, the video uses straightforward, non-technical language to make the information

accessible to a wide audience, including those without a medical background. The script opts for relatable terminology, often supplemented with visual aids to reinforce understanding. The delivery of the information is calm and measured, which matches the educational purpose of the video. The tone of the communication is informative, educational and supportive. By combining clear language with visual metaphors and graphics, the video aims to reduce misinformation, providing viewers with the knowledge needed to understand HIV and the available treatments. This approachable and informative style helps both a wide audience not enough informed about the disease and the medical condition of those affected, and HIV positive people in fostering a sense of empowerment, encouraging them to take control of their health.

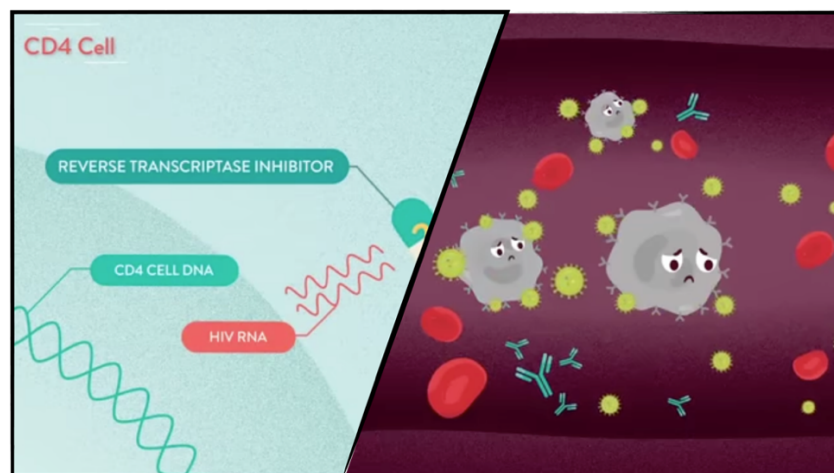


Figure 11. *Understanding HIV and its Treatment* (ITPC, 2020). Screen captures © ITPC

6. Discussion and conclusion

Figure 2 revealed that, in recent years, it has been possible to observe an increased use of animation in HIV awareness campaigns, particularly from 2020 onwards. This trend highlights the growing recognition of animation as an effective medium for addressing sensitive topics like HIV and the associated stigma. Animation offers a unique combination of accessibility and visual storytelling that can convey complex messages in an engaging way, making it well-suited for educational and awareness purposes (Honesty Roe, 2013).

Most of the videos analysed in this article tend to fall into a few key categories – sentimental and moving, reassuring and positive, funny and ironic, or informative and documentary – that reflect a preference for approaches that evoke specific emotional responses and foster empathy, understanding, and a sense of empowerment among audiences. Interestingly, none of the videos employed transgressive or provocative language, and only a couple used a dramatic or denouncing tone. This suggests that most campaigns prefer to communicate in ways that are accessible and emotionally appealing, rather than confrontational or shocking. Despite these insights, there remains a need to continue consulting the archives of foundations, associations, and NGOs to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies being employed. Expanding this research could reveal additional trends and approaches that might contribute to more effective awareness campaigns in the future.

Finally, it is worth observing the innovative direction taken by the Gilead Sciences Campaigns in 2020 and 2021, which involved the participation of students. This initiative opened new perspectives for integrating HIV-related topics into educational settings, using animation as a collaborative tool for learning (see Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2015). Engaging students in the co-creation of these animated artifacts not only helps them develop skills in handling scientific data and narrative content but also fosters greater awareness and understanding of the issues surrounding HIV and AIDS (Friendlytest, 2022). This participatory approach could serve as a model for future campaigns, combining education with creative engagement to combat stigma.

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