

News magazine, 1991.

Comic book *AIDS Connection*, 1993.

*AIDS is a mass murderer*. Posters of a private organisation in Germany, 2009.

## INTRODUCTION

The study sheds light on the development of the cultural representation of HIV/AIDS in Germany, Austria and Switzerland from the 1980ies until present times. It analyses the contribution of literature, theatre, and film to the public discourse on HIV/AIDS and characterises the rhetorical and iconographic strategies used to construct, represent, and discuss as well as deal with the disease. The focus lies on the functions of literature, theatre, and film within the HIV/AIDS discourse.

## METHODS

Micro level:  
The research project uses methods from Cultural Studies, Theatre Studies and German Studies to analyse the reception of aesthetic strategies – the ‘what’ and ‘how’ – of literary, theatrical and cinematic representations of HIV/AIDS.

Macro level:  
Interdiscourse analysis (Jürgen Link) and sociological systems theory (Niklas Luhmann) are applied to describe the dramaturgical development of the discourse on HIV/AIDS.

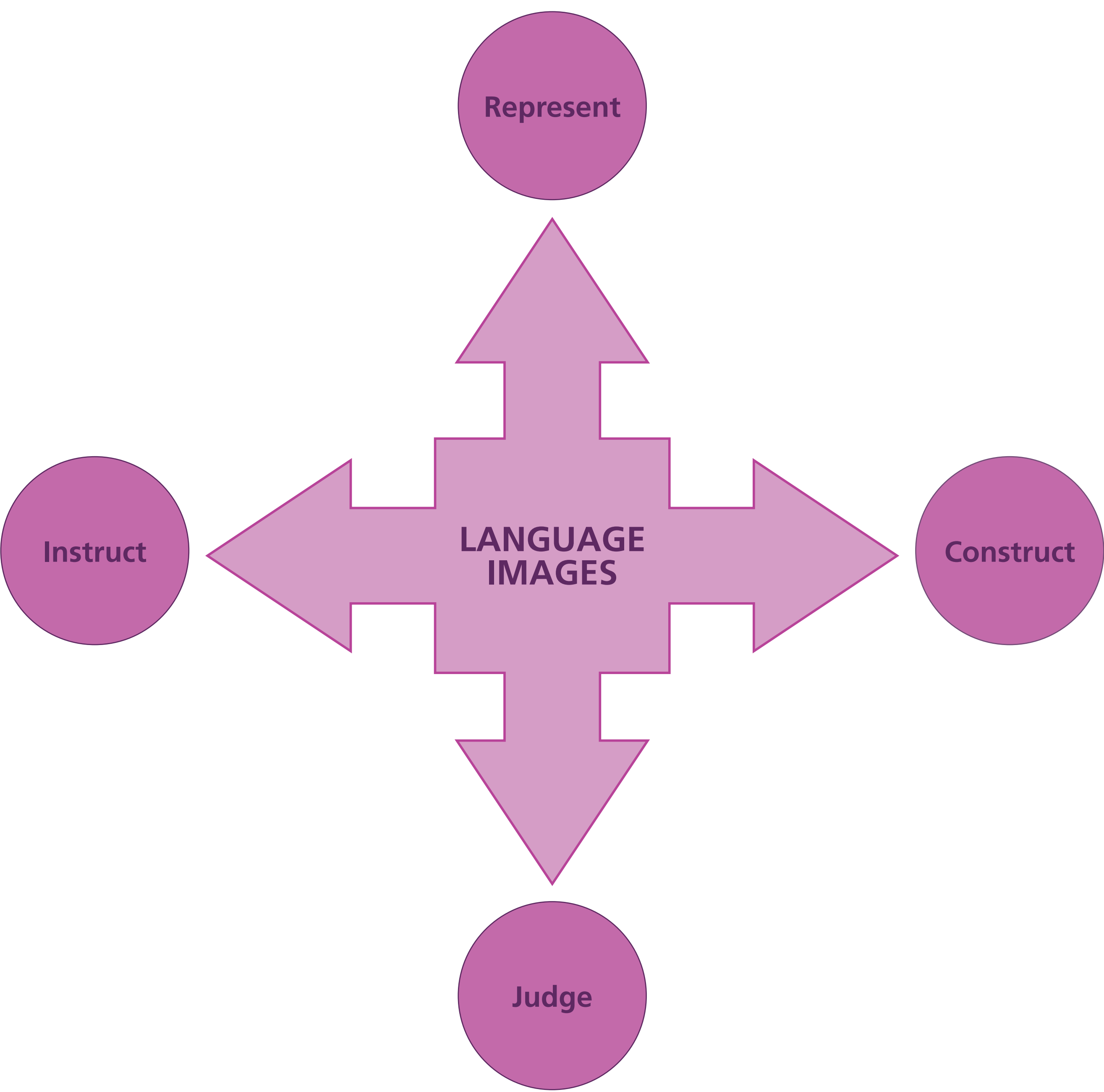
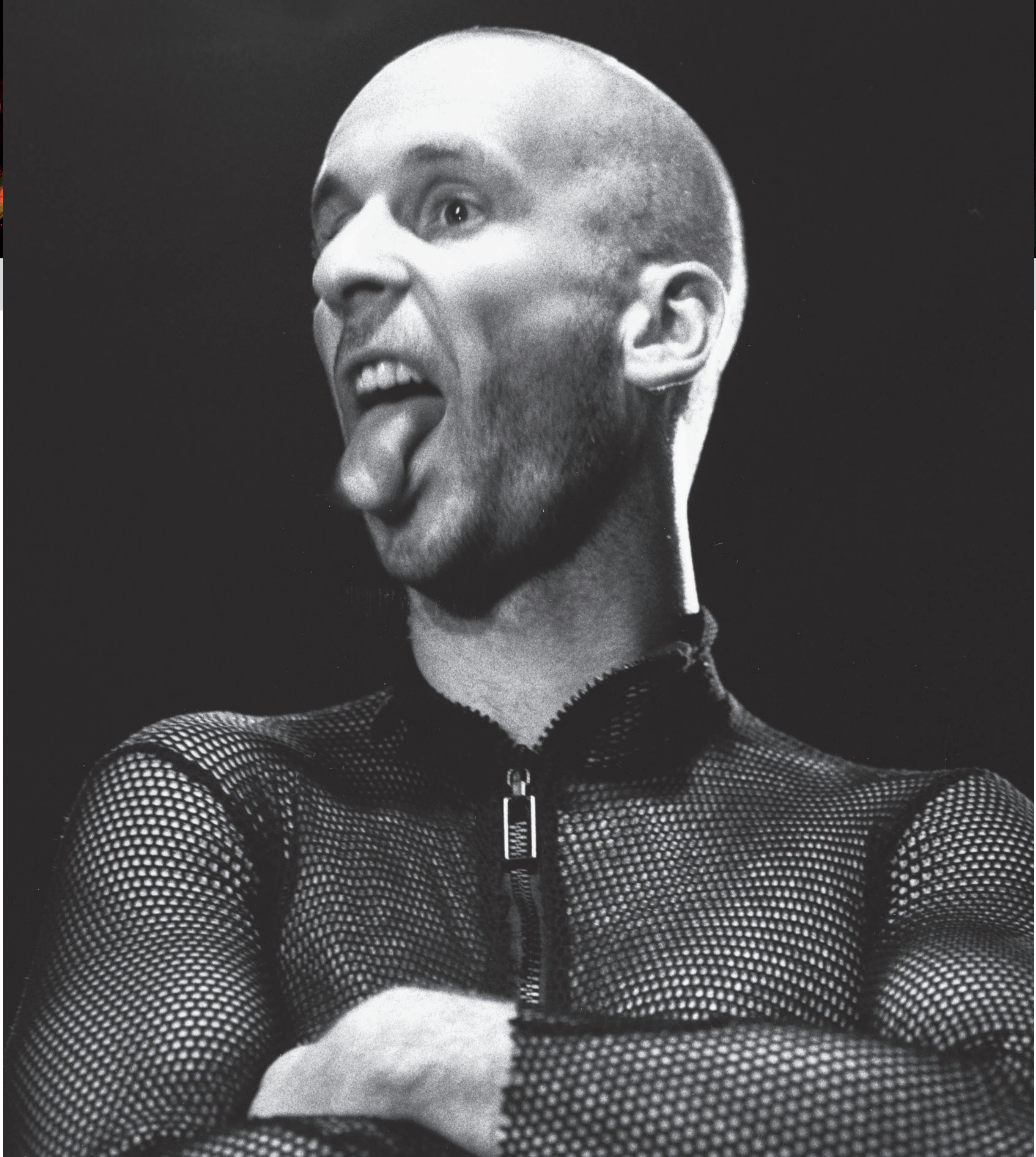


Figure 1: The functions of language and images in cultural communication.



Beate Schappach

# AIDS in German Literature, Theatre, and Film

The Cultural Dramaturgy of Disorder

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CHRONOS



*Angels in America*, Zurich 1993.

Patients with Kaposi's sarcoma in the film *Philadelphia*, USA 1993.

## RESULTS

The development of the rhetoric and iconographic representations of HIV/AIDS in German speaking countries can be divided into seven stages:

- |                          |  |
|--------------------------|--|
| 1. Exclusion and Blame   | 5. Apocalyptic Scenarios                             |
| 2. Prevention            | 6. Thrill  |
| 3. Integration           | 7. Normalisation & Recurrence of Exclusion and Blame |
| 4. Refuse of Integration |  |

The dramaturgy of the discourse on HIV/AIDS was initialised by the first occurrence of the disease in the 1980ies. In the first years, it followed the pattern of historical epidemic discourses such as the plague, leprosy, and syphilis. Two major plot points have changed the structure of the discourse altogether: the discovery of the HI-Virus and the introduction of combined antiretroviral therapy. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, AIDS is no longer perceived as an epidemic, but as a chronic illness. This results in the normalisation of the discursive approach to the disease. Nevertheless, discrimination patterns known from the 1980ies resurface in the media today.

## CONCLUSION

In the complex relationship between cultural and medical communication in the face of HIV/AIDS, literature, theatre, and film perform different functions of dealing with the disease:

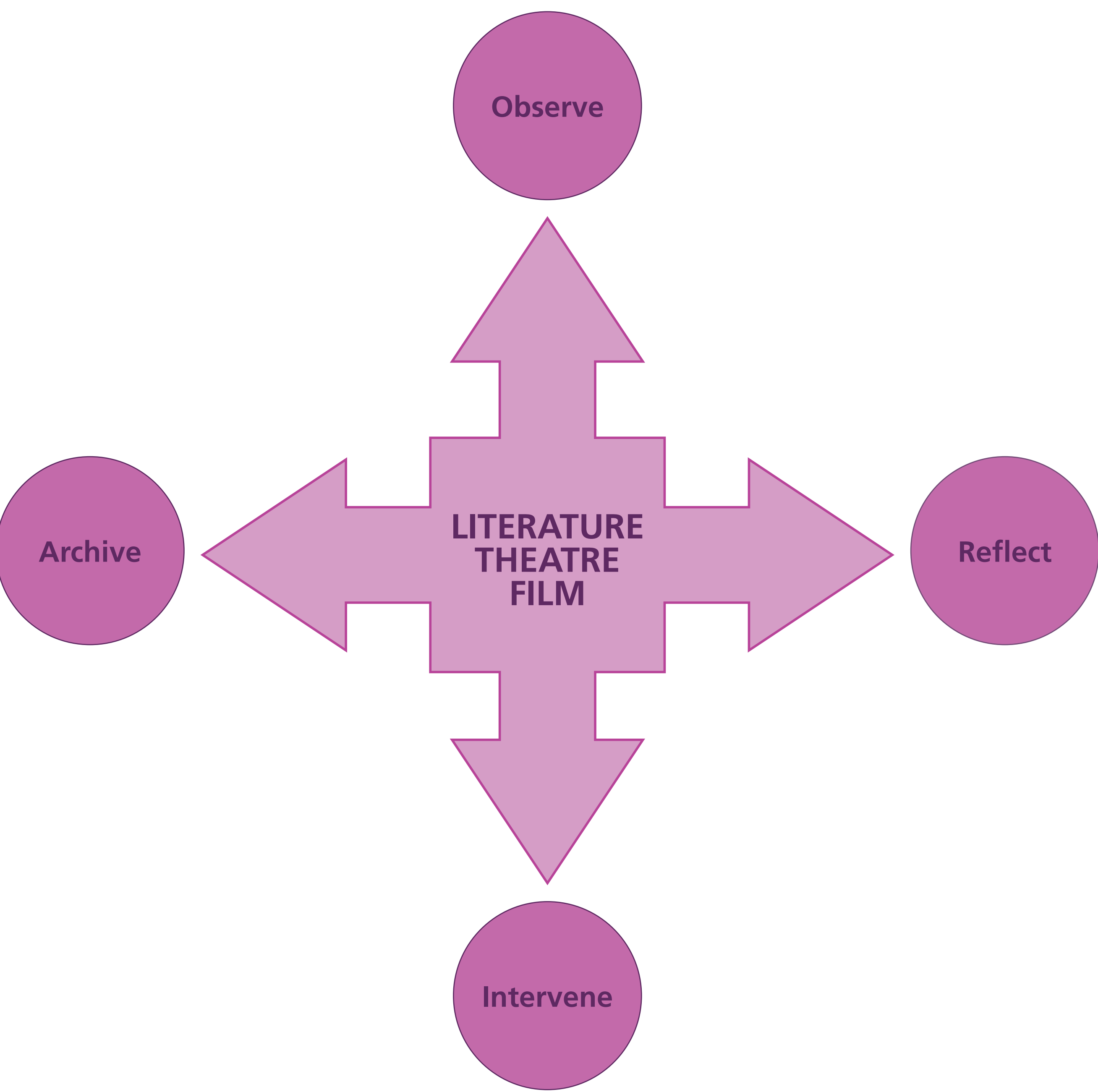


Figure 2: The functions of literature, theatre, and film within the discourse on HIV/AIDS.



TV spot, Switzerland 1991.

Poster, Switzerland 1992.

Poster, Germany 2006–2008.



Poster Michael Stich Foundation, Germany 2007.

Poster AIDES, France 2005.

Defendant in the TV series *Boston Legal*, USA 2007: paedophile, rapist, AIDS sufferer.