**Event report: *Reza Abdoh: A Documentary Film* Screening (December 11th)**

This event was the last event organized by the HIV Reading Group at the University of Manchester, led by Stian Kristensen, of 2019. With the HIV/AIDS in the 21st Century conference approaching in January, associated with the reading group, we thought a free movie screening with wine reception would be an apt method of introducing more students to the reading group, and also serve to advertise for the conference. A movie screening had also been requested by several reading group attendees.

While the event was initially scheduled for late November, we decided to postpone it to December 11th in order to not interfere with the strikes that were ongoing.

The film was chosen due to its potential outreach, talking about medical research, AIDS activism, drama and performance, and also due to its importance in documenting the work of an artist that died too early due to AIDS related complications. As such, the film fit neatly both into the reading group, with its discussion of HIV/AIDS, and also to that of the conference, as the film discusses the impact of Abdoh’s work in the 21st century. Furthermore, Louisa Hann – who co-organizes the reading group and the conference with undersigned – specializes in the field of HIV/AIDS theatre, and gave a vivid introduction to the film, detailing the political aspects of Abdoh’s work and the importance of his legacy.

In order to procure rights for screening the film, I approached the director Adam Soch by email. Soch was enthusiastic about the potential of a screening, and we negotiated a fee of 75 GBP for screening the film at the University. Furthermore, Soch was helpful in advertising the screening and providing the tools for screening the film successfully, including also a press-kit for producing advertising material. I paid the 75 GBP to the film company, and reclaimed this back from the University.

While we had intended to order Wine using Taste Manchester, artsmethods suggested we use Majestic Wine instead. After calculating potential interest in the screening (we were aiming for around 30 people), we settled on 12 bottles of wine, 6 of red and 6 of white, partially because ordering in quantities of 6 were cheaper than ordering bottles individually. The Majestic prices were indeed cheaper than Taste, and we managed to save approximately 42 pounds by ordering with them. Anastasia Valassopoulos kindly provided glasses for the event.

We advertised the event heavily on social media, including Twitter and Facebook. We also utilized available Manchester-based networks such as the QRNM (Queer Research Network Manchester), Superbia and the LGBT Foundation. Superbia very kindly promoted the event on their website, while the LGBT Foundation notified their staff of the event, and, as mentioned above, Adam Soch aided us in distributing information about the screening on Facebook, including the Reza Abdoh memorial Facebook page. Louisa and I also went on a poster-run around the University of Manchester, and I sent out emails for student representatives of several departments to distribute, detailing the event.

Although we did not get as many attendees as we wanted, we managed to reach several people who were unfamiliar with Abdoh’s work, particularly undergraduates. After the film I handed out a Feedback Form, and asked the attendees to write down some thoughts on the film. The comments were very good, and I subsequently shared these with Adam Soch, who knew Abdoh and directed the film, who was very appreciative of the time and effort put into screening the film in Manchester.

While most of the comments focus on the film’s production quality, some comments relate that the attendees were personally moved by it. One student wrote that they “found the film thrilling” and went on to write that they “could relate to Reza’s work and feel that I will explore it further in my own time.” Another student commented that they thought it was “great to see something so avant-garde and experimental, for the focus to be on a theatremaker outside the mainstream canon. The documentary was so informative and clearly done.”

Soch’s favorite comment was one student who wrote that the film “made me want to start drama again … haven’t done any since age 12 and I’m 21!” The same student asl owrote that they “didn’t feel sad at [Abdoh’s] death, more happy that he lived” and went on to comment that they “Loved it, didn’t get ‘bored’ that’s for certain.

Others commented that the film was “Shocking and powerful” and found it “surprising” that Reza is relatively “unknown considering the impact Reza had on theatre.” This student also commented that they “enjoyed the fact that a lot of his work is a big middle finger to traditional conventions.” Some also commented on Hann’s introduction to the film, which helped contextualize Abdoh’s work and served as a great introduction to understanding it in light of HIV/AIDS and the genre of HIV/AIDS theatre.

Thus, although we did not reach as many as we had hoped, I think those that came along to the event were happy with it, and indeed galvanized into doing further research or expressing themselves through different creative methods (such as drama). I am therefore thoroughly pleased with the event, and believe it may have contributed not just to keeping Abdoh’s legacy alive, but also may have introduced several to the problem that HIV/AIDS continues to constitute in the modern world, and indeed the importance of negotiating past artistic explorations of the virus in order to assess its role in the present. Exactly what the HIV Reading Group, and now the HIV/AIDS in the 21st Century conference aims to do.

**Final Budget:**

Screening licence: 75 GBP

Wine: 107,88 GBP

Total expenditure: 182,88

Budget asked for: 225.