

Cambridge University Press
0521837707 - AIDS, Rhetoric, and Medical Knowledge
Alex Preda
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

AIDS, Rhetoric, and Medical Knowledge

This book examines the formation of scientific knowledge about the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and shows the broader cultural assumptions on which this knowledge is grounded. Alex Preda highlights the metaphors, narratives, and classifications that framed scientific hypotheses about the nature of the infectious agent and its means of transmission and compares these arguments with those used in the scientific literature about SARS. Through detailed rhetorical analysis of biomedical publications, the author shows how scientific knowledge about epidemics is shaped by cultural narratives and categories of social thought.

Preda situates his analysis in the broader frame of the world risk society, where scientific knowledge is called upon to support and shape public policies regarding prevention and health maintenance, among others. But can these policies avoid the influence of cultural narratives and social classifications? This book shows how culture affects prevention and health policies as well as the ways in which scientific research is organized and funded.

Alex Preda holds a doctorate in sociology from the University of Bielefeld and received the 1998 dissertation prize of the Academic Society of Westfalia-Lippe. He has taught at the universities of Bielefeld and Konstanz, Germany. He is coeditor of *The Sociology of Financial Markets*.

Cambridge University Press
0521837707 - AIDS, Rhetoric, and Medical Knowledge
Alex Preda
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

AIDS, Rhetoric, and Medical Knowledge

ALEX PREDA
University of Edinburgh



Cambridge University Press
 0521837707 - AIDS, Rhetoric, and Medical Knowledge
 Alex Preda
 Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
 The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
 Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Alex Preda 2005

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
 no reproduction of any part may take place without
 the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

Typeface Sabon 10/13.5 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Preda, Alex, 1960–

AIDS, rhetoric, and medical knowledge / Alex Preda.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-83770-7

1. AIDS (Disease) – Social aspects. 2. Social medicine. 3. Rhetoric.
 4. Medicine – Language. I. Title.

RA643.8.P737 2004

362.196'9792 – dc22

2004045757

ISBN 0 521 83770 7 hardback

Cambridge University Press
0521837707 - AIDS, Rhetoric, and Medical Knowledge
Alex Preda
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

For Roxana and Dante

vi·rus (vīrəs), *n., pl. -rus·es*. 1. an infectious agent, esp. any of a group of ultramicroscopic, infectious agents that reproduce only in living cells [...] 5. a corrupting influence on morals or the intellect; poison [...]

(Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language)

SIR, [...] AIDS appeared out of the blue a few years ago and, apart from causing immunodeficiency, it has been responsible for two other syndromes – the “minimum publishable unit syndrome” (MPUS) and the “how many authors can I cram onto one paper syndrome” (HMACICOOPS). These syndromes may well be responsible for as many deaths as AIDS itself. Many important medical papers must have been squeezed out by the interminable reporting of AIDS, and, more importantly, a great deal of useful and potentially more beneficial research has not been founded or carried out because so many scientists have jumped on the AIDS bandwagon knowing that most of their work, whatever the results, will be published in reputable journals, which seem to be AIDS struck. [...] It is this sort of publication that has encouraged MPUS and HMACICOOPS to such an extent that they threaten to strangle our journals and stop good work being done or published. It is time journals of international repute took a stand and stamped these malignant syndromes out.

(A. R. Mellersh, “AIDS and Authors,” *The Lancet* 11/8393, July 7, 1984, p. 41)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	i
<i>AIDS and Scientific Knowledge</i>	
1 Making Up the Rules of Seeing <i>Opportunistic Infections and the New Syndrome</i>	45
2 The Economy of Risk Categories	67
3 The Etiologic Agent and the Rhetoric of Scientific Debate	113
4 Retrovirus vs. Retrovirus <i>The Arguments for HTLV-III, LAV, and HIV</i>	156
5 The Spatial Configurations of “AIDS Risk”	188
6 Who Is How Much? <i>From Qualities to Quantities of AIDS Risk</i>	210
7 In Lieu of a Conclusion <i>Do Rhetorical Practices Matter?</i>	225
<i>References</i>	249
<i>Index</i>	269

Acknowledgments

This book has been in the making for some time. As is the case with projects that grow over the years, it has benefited from the input of many people and from many intellectual exchanges. In the project stage, it was like a small planet that gained mass, shape, and momentum from the various intellectual forces with which I interacted. These forces were situated on different orbits: some were more distant, playing a role in the context of my work; others were nearer, exerting a direct influence on it. On a more distant orbit, two people have made the creation of this book possible. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht many years ago placed a bet on a very uncertain outcome when he awarded me a doctoral fellowship in the Graduate School of Communication, which he was leading at the University of Siegen. This book now exists because of his bet. Sepp Gumbrecht is known for encouraging young, unknown students and for his willingness to take a risk with them. It is only fitting, then, to acknowledge my debt to him in a book about the rhetoric of risk. K. Ludwig Pfeiffer encouraged and supported me during my first years of study at the Graduate School. Above all, the emphasis on interdisciplinary study, and the openness and dialogue systematically promoted by Sepp and Ludwig as the School's first directors, have shaped my belief in the conversation of scholars from the social sciences and the humanities, a belief which I hope this book mirrors clearly.

A third scholar from whom I have greatly benefited, directly and indirectly, is Franz-Xaver Kaufmann: his encouragement, trust, and

willingness to accept research interests different from his own made possible the continuation of my work at the University of Bielefeld.

On a very near orbit, I have strongly benefited from being the student and collaborator of Karin Knorr Cetina at the University of Bielefeld and the University of Konstanz. Karin, I cannot even begin to recount here all that I have learned from you regarding research methods and sociological perspective. You too placed a bet, and I hope it has paid off.

The arguments presented in this book were developed in many intellectual exchanges with the members of the laboratory studies group at the University of Bielefeld. It is fitting to pay tribute here to the special intellectual atmosphere and dynamic exchanges in the weekly meetings of this group in the second half of the 1990s. I must single out Karin, Stefan Hirschauer, Jens Lachmund, and Klaus Amman as partners in conversations, and sometimes even in friendly disputes. Stefan, Jens, and Klaus took a keen interest in my work and never spared their criticism, as good friends do: thank you.

From a geographical distance, Steven Epstein read parts of the text and shared his work with me: thank you, Steve.

Alia Winters and Ed Parsons, my editors at Cambridge University Press, have valued my book project and supported it. Special thanks go here to Alia, who provided many useful observations for the final version of the manuscript.

Patricia Skorge gave me invaluable assistance in improving the style of this book and patiently accepted many requests for help on short notice. She is a true professional and has done a wonderful job. Ann Marie Schroeder also helped in solving many problems in the production of the final version of this manuscript.

Last, but not least, Roxana constantly encouraged me in the writing process and provided moral support throughout. Dante, our son, developed a late, yet unexpectedly strong interest in my having written a book. It is to them that I owe my greatest debt.

Abbreviations

<i>AIM</i>	Annals of Internal Medicine
<i>AJDC</i>	American Journal of Diseases in Children
<i>AJE</i>	American Journal of Epidemiology
<i>AJPH</i>	American Journal of Public Health
<i>EID</i>	Emerging Infectious Diseases
<i>JAHC</i>	Journal of Adolescent Health Care
<i>JAMA</i>	Journal of the American Medical Association
<i>JP</i>	Journal of Pediatrics
<i>JSTD</i>	Journal of Sexually Transmitted Diseases
<i>MMWR</i>	Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report
<i>NEJM</i>	New England Journal of Medicine