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## 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*.

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ALEX PREDA  
*University of Edinburgh*



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*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)

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## 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