
Peter Gordon

To cite this version:


HAL Id: hal-00687729
https://hal.science/hal-00687729
Submitted on 14 Apr 2012

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.
**Book review:** HIV Interventions: biomedicine and the traffic between information and the flesh. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Journal:</th>
<th>AIDS Care - Psychology, Health &amp; Medicine - Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript ID:</td>
<td>AC-2010-07-0410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Selection:</td>
<td>AIDS Care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keywords:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the very early days of the HIV epidemic, its history has been told through multiple, parallel, narratives. The first, and best known, is the narrative that runs through the standard medical literature and is, in turn, translated for the layman through mainstream media. Key elements of this story include the by now familiar challenges and breakthroughs that have mapped our way through the epidemic: diagnosis of AIDS, discovery of HIV, tests (for HIV antibodies, CD4 counts, viral load etc), treatments, combination therapy etc.

At the same time, another narrative has been unfolding. This is the story of the epidemic as reflected in the work social and cultural theorists and activists, such as Cindy Patton, Paula Treichler, Douglas Crimp, Judith Butler and Simon Watney, to name but a few. Their critiques of the epidemic and responses to it challenge some taken-for-granted concepts and assumptions and distinctions that have influenced the scientific, medical, social and political responses to the epidemic such as: epidemiological categories and identities, safer sex, polarities between nature and culture, and distinctions between the biological and the social and between subjects and objects.

Rosengarten builds upon this literature by exploring what she describes as the traffic between HIV interventions and human bodies. This metaphor is particularly apt in conveying the notion of agency, of interventions and people acting upon each other. Consider, for example, what the course of the epidemic might have been without HIV activism?

The author focuses on the implications of the ‘decoupling’ of HIV and AIDS and considers interventions - such as viral load testing and ART (which she describes as an ‘unsatisfactory privilege’ that remains unavailable to the vast majority of those who may need it) - as more than medical procedures, but rather as performative, social and cultural events. Viewed thus, scientific intervention and human bodies are actually mutually constitutive.

In this way, the author challenges any simplistic conceptualisation of a passive human object acted upon in the name of science - categorised by risk factors, targeted, tested, diagnosed and treated (or not) by science - and reveals instead a relationships that is at once complex, dynamic and shifting.

At just over 100 pages (plus notes and references), this is a short book. Nonetheless it is a difficult read, especially for anyone unfamiliar with social and cultural theory. One cannot help feeling that there are practical implications of this kind of approach for...
practitioners, but ultimately these are insufficiently articulated and the reader is left to speculate.

Peter Gordon PhD., M.Sc., Dip H.S., M.A. (Hons). Independent Consultant in HIV, Sexual Health and Development