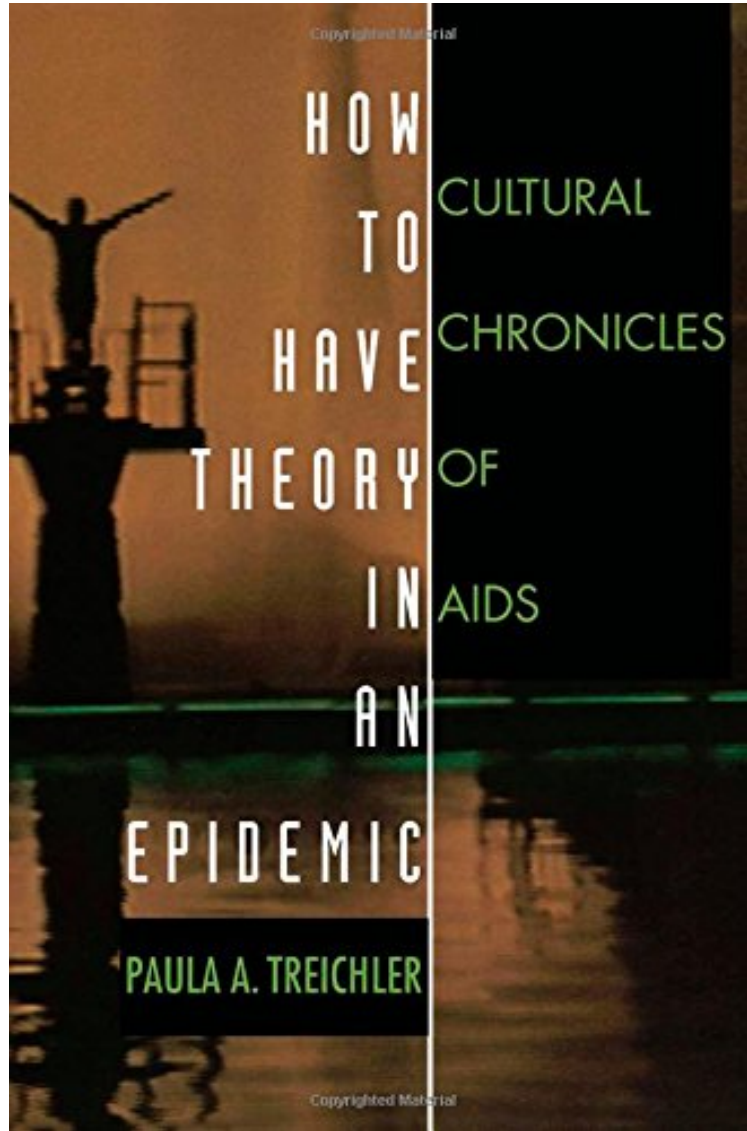


(Download free ebook) How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS (Series Q)

# How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS (Series Q)

Paula A. Treichler

ePub | \*DOC | audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF



[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#421443 in Books Duke University Press Books 1999-07-19 Original language: English PDF # 1 9.24 x 1.50 x 5.981, 1.78 #File Name: 0822323184496 pages | File size: 59.Mb

**Paula A. Treichler : How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS (Series Q)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS (Series Q):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By Shanker excellent shape, saved a lot from college bookstore price!! 1 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Holistic Approach By A Customer I

enjoyed reading the book as it examines the cultural aspects of the pandemic. We each need to question our own cultural assumptions as we analyze just what happened to make this such a disaster.

Paula A. Treichler has become a singularly important voice among the significant theorists on the AIDS crisis. Dissecting the cultural politics surrounding representations of HIV and AIDS, her work has altered the field of cultural studies by establishing medicine as a legitimate focus for cultural analysis. *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic* is a comprehensive collection of Treichler's related writings, including revised and updated essays from the 1980s and 1990s that present a sustained argument about the AIDS epidemic from a uniquely knowledgeable and interdisciplinary standpoint. AIDS is more than an epidemic disease, Treichler writes, it is an epidemic of meanings. Exploring how such meanings originate, proliferate, and take hold, her essays investigate how certain interpretations of the epidemic dominate while others are obscured. They also suggest ways to understand and choose between overlapping or competing discourses. In her coverage of roughly fifteen years of the AIDS epidemic, Treichler addresses a range of key issues, from biomedical discourse and theories of pathogenesis to the mainstream media's depictions of the crisis in both developed and developing countries. She also examines representations of women and AIDS, treatment issues, and the role of activism in shaping the politics of the epidemic. Linking the AIDS tragedy to a uniquely broad spectrum of contemporary theory and culture, this collection concludes with an essay on the continued importance of theoretical thought for untangling the sociocultural phenomena of AIDS and for tackling the disease itself. With an exhaustive bibliography of critical and theoretical writings on HIV and AIDS, this long-awaited volume will be essential to all those invested in studying the course of AIDS, its devastating medical effects, and its massive impact on contemporary culture. It should become a standard text in university courses dealing with AIDS in biomedicine, sociology, anthropology, gay and lesbian studies, women's studies, and cultural and media studies.

.com One of the most effective forms of resistance to AIDS, oddly enough, has been the academic essay anthology, beginning with Douglas Crimp's *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (1988), the prototype of discursive intervention. Paula Treichler's *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic* derives its title from the epilogue Crimp wrote for his collection: "How to Have Promiscuity in an Epidemic," which took its cue from a song by Michael Callen. Aside from physical and mental crisis, AIDS has produced what Treichler calls "an epidemic of signification." In the early years of the syndrome, that is, more words than drugs were flung, usually to contain certain people's supposedly pathological behavior than to fight the virus--but also to recapture metaphor and to press cultural studies in the service of resistance. *How to Have Theory* in a sense revisits and chronicles that period. Treichler, a professor at the University of Illinois, revised material that originally appeared years earlier in journals and anthologies, in the meantime enlarging the scholarly apparatus (fully a third of the book comprises the notes, bibliography, and index, indispensable to the researcher) and providing more illustrations. The result is one of the most important books on AIDS. Treichler examines medical language, gender issues, television and magazines, and journalistic accounts of AIDS in the Third World. She skillfully analyzes the ways that medicine and the media have constructed certain kinds of diseased bodies upon which to project coercive fantasies of sex, drug use, and ethnicity. As Treichler notes, "The AIDS epidemic ... reminds us that the practices that we call science have evolved in part as a series of safeguards against the seductive power of culture, society, language, and individual consciousness to perceive and define reality in ways that are scientifically or aesthetically appealing, politically or personally palatable." Thus, even as she indicts science for its practical and semantic failures, she demonstrates that within science itself we shall overcome. --Robert Burns Nevelandine  
From *The New England Journal of Medicine*  
The idea that the responses of individuals and organizations to diseases are shaped by culture is not as controversial as it once was. The great therapeutic innovations in medicine surely stem from the concept that science is insulated from social forces, but the ways in which social and cultural forces can influence science and medicine are increasingly familiar. The way in which the story of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and AIDS has unfolded over the past two decades is becoming an important topic of study by social and cultural theorists, because it provides so many examples of illness as a cultural phenomenon with individual, social, and political ramifications. Changes in the ways in which we understand homosexuality and sex, the rise of efforts to empower patients, and the increase in activism have been spurred by AIDS. In *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*, Paula Treichler has made an important new contribution to this young field. The cultural chronicles presented in this book are essays written during the past decade; they describe and explain the many themes that emerge in popular depictions of HIV and AIDS. Because the chapters and essays were conceived separately, the book does not have a cohesive focus. This could be seen as a weakness by some, but, in fact, the format makes what could be a dense treatise more readable. Furthermore, the thesis that the AIDS epidemic has cultural and linguistic as well as biologic and medical aspects is well illustrated in the book. One example is the way in which the television industry first faced the problem of depicting AIDS during the politically conservative mid-1980s. In her essay "AIDS Narratives on Television," Treichler analyzes two of the earliest efforts to deal with AIDS: *An Early Frost*, first broadcast by the NBC network in November 1985, and *Our Sons*, broadcast by the ABC network in May 1991. As Treichler sees it, these dramas dealt with the challenge of presenting homosexuality to prime-time

audiences (and advertisers) largely by focusing the narrative away from the gay characters with AIDS and instead emphasizing the effects of the illness on their heterosexual relatives. This strategy helped steer the producers toward the admirable goal of showing gay relationships with unprecedented candor. But Treichler rightly stops short of being too congratulatory; after all, these movies managed to present their stories without once mentioning condoms or safe sex at a time when hundreds of thousands of Americans were infected with HIV. The author is at her strongest in discussing the ways in which culture and the media have shaped the public's understanding of who is at risk for infection with HIV. The attribution of epidemic diseases to "outsiders" or to socially marginalized groups is common and is a familiar theme in descriptions of social responses to syphilis, plague, smallpox, and of course, AIDS. These attributions are responses to social and cultural forces, and are often not based on epidemiologic evidence. Depictions of HIV as imported to the United States from Haiti or from Africa have parallels within Africa itself, where Malawians may identify Mozambicans as sources of infection, and vice versa. Ironically, the notion that AIDS was a problem of socially marginalized groups contributed to dramatic depictions by the media later in the epidemic, as reflected by a famous Life magazine cover story in July 1985 ("Now No One Is Safe from AIDS"). As Treichler correctly points out, the presentation of both extremes caused inaccurate perceptions about the real public health message: that the risks of HIV are associated with behavior rather than demographic characteristics. The methods of the historian seem to work poorly in the absence of a detachment from the periods and places being described. Because of this, many of Treichler's histories offer few new ideas and do not provide a context for their subjects. Nevertheless, even though it is not a work of historical scholarship, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic* provides much of the insight into events that we might otherwise look for in cultural histories of the HIV epidemic published years from now. The author's scholarship spans the media, from high art to comic strips, from Philadelphia to General Hospital, and from National Geographic and Newsweek to *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. The book is meticulously footnoted and largely (though not entirely) free of jargon specific to the academic field of cultural studies. Some will find a few passages slow going. This book is an important addition to the growing literature analyzing illness -- and the HIV epidemic -- from social and cultural perspectives, and it will be appreciated by many. Allen L. Gifford, M.D. Copyright 2000 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The New England Journal of Medicine is a registered trademark of the MMS. Looking backward and ahead, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic* is nothing short of a handbook of the meanings of AIDS: as human experience, as political reality, as public service action, and, not least of all, as moral engagement with one of the great challenges to meaning-making and unmaking in everyday life. Dr. Arthur Kleinman, Harvard University