Future Shock

November 1, 1999 By Celia Farber

For all the reams of newsprint, acres of film, heaps of data, AIDS is still a subject governed by censorship and taboo. What are we allowed to say, and how? *Truth*, that belabored word, can only be approached by a complex understanding of which information is being revealed and concealed. The concealed, of course, is far more potent—sometimes it is the very suppression of information that allows for truth to be known. That said, perhaps the only society more dangerous than one that systematically suppresses information is one that suppresses none.

When I began writing about the epidemic in 1986, there was, of course, no Internet. Quaintly, I titled my AIDS column in *Spin* "Words From the Front"—because there was a front, a stark border between the unspoken and the spoken. As I pushed certain voices, views, facts across this border, the blood on the floor made it clear which were explosive, what was taboo, how much the words *weighed*. I remember vividly when it was verboten to say that anybody might survive AIDS or that AZT was not a wonder drug.

I used to deflect attacks from those who called me a murderous propagandist by stressing that my column was simply a meeting room where unheard voices could be heard. Little could I have imagined that a few years later, there would exist a "room" of infinite space where everything and anything could be expressed: the Internet.

What I love about the Internet is that it has decentralized and depressurized AIDS discourse—information is no longer passed vertically, from the ‘‘experts" of science and journalism down to the masses, but passed horizontally, between ordinary people free to cultivate their own sense of reality. But what worries me about it is the very same thing. A universe of voices—yet are they audible? Is this an outlet or a void?

When all discourse was contained within the membranes of print, TV and radio, there was at least a tangible frontier where information was processed. Now the barriers are gone. Information about AIDS is free, but it is also infinite, and disturbingly weightless. And what does it mean to express yourself in a place with no sound, no people, no consequences?

The AIDS conversation is eerily quiet these days. This must be the future.

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.
http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/Future-Shock-12058-5843