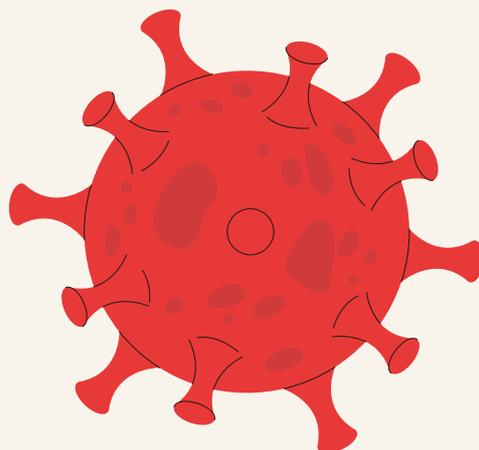


THREE-DAY ONLINE WORKSHOP

THINKING WITH VIRUSES

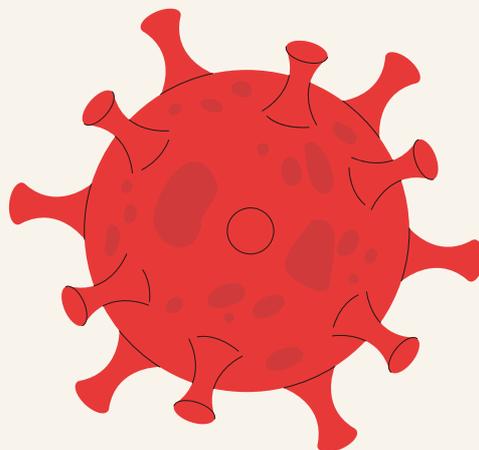
(OCTOBER 19–21, 2022)

The workshop, organized as part of the project *Epidemics and Communities in Critical Theories, Artistic Practices and Speculative Fabulations of the Last Decades* financed by the Polish National Science Centre within Opus 20 funding scheme (UMO-2020/39/B/HS2/00755), takes a closer look at viruses because their substantial and figurative potential may open up new perspectives on how to disrupt current imaginaries of epidemics. In many respects, viruses present a borderline case which subverts the fundamental categories of Western sciences premised on binary thinking. Until recently conceptualized and researched mainly as a threat to mankind and agents of mortality, currently viruses are being increasingly recognized in an entirely different way as agents of life and life's diversity. They have not only proved useful in gene therapy, where they are instrumental in replacing damaged genes in human tissue with a working one. They could also be regarded as a guiding force of evolution. The legacy of ancient infections might be found in as much as eight percent of the human genome, including the genes that controlled memory formation, the immune system, and cognitive development. In other words, viruses are both around us and in us – they define us as human beings on more than just biological level. They are the trouble we have to live with, as Donna Haraway would have it.



In her *Geontologies* (2016) Elizabeth Povinelli names the Virus one of three figures that “are diagnostic and symptomatic of the present way in which late liberalism governs difference and markets in a differential social geography.” In so doing, Povinelli points to a critically subversive role the figure plays in the current biopolitical arrangements of Life and Nonlife – a division which does not define or contain the Virus. However, Povinelli not only equals the Virus with negatively assessed dwelling in an existential crisis characteristic of late liberalism, but also regards this existential crisis a chance for creating alternative paths, especially in times of planetary crisis. One of this alternative paths could be to think with viruses as exemplary monsters of the Anthropocene in a way which brings us closer to more hopeful, indeterminate futures. Thinking with viruses as metaphors we live WITH (not BY as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson would have it in their famous 1980 cognitivist study) can be instrumental in finding new ontologies, concepts, and ethics of epidemics which the Covid-19 pandemic has been urging us to look for.

To reach the aim, each day of the workshop starts with a keynote lecture of a well-known expert on viruses, followed by a discussion. Every lecture offers a different approach to the main topic of the workshop as well as sets a framework for three/four papers which present a closer look at chosen examples of multi-media speculative fabulations and viral practices. A discussion of half an hour ends each of the workshop’s days.



PROGRAMME

DAY 1

(OCTOBER 19, 2022)

4:00 – 5:30 pm (GMT+2)

Astrid SCHRADER (University of Exeter)

Thinking with Marine Viruses as Elemental Ghosts

6:00 – 8:00 pm (GMT+2)

Filip RYBA (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warszawa)

**Virusing of Western Knowledge: A New Perspective on
Provincializing, Locality, and Practices of Cognition**

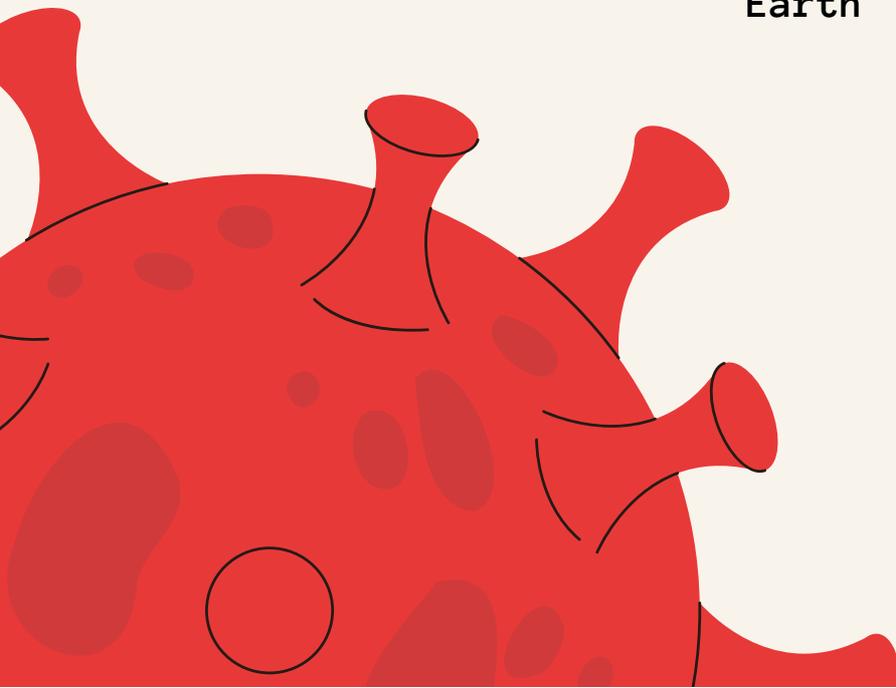
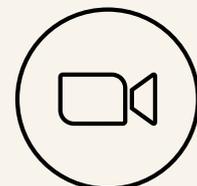
Jakub PAWLAK (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

**Indigenous Social Practice as a Blood-Borne Virus. Sámi
Artistic Autoethnographies of Bodies that Carry and Bleed
Heritage**

Małgorzata SUGIERA (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

**Another Evolution: Speculating about Viruses and Life on
Earth**

ZOOM link:



PROGRAMME

DAY 2

(OCTOBER 20, 2022)

4:00 – 5:30 pm (GMT+2)

Adam NOCEK (Arizona State University)

Seeing Too Much COVID: On Viruses, Immunity, and Epistemic Media

6:00 – 8:30 pm (GMT+2)

Dorota SOSNOWSKA (University of Warsaw)

Performing HIV/AIDS – Biopolitics and Capitalism in Post-Communist Poland

Łukasz KIEŁPIŃSKI (University of Warsaw)

Managing the Ambiguities – Masculinity and HIV in Polish 1990s Cinema

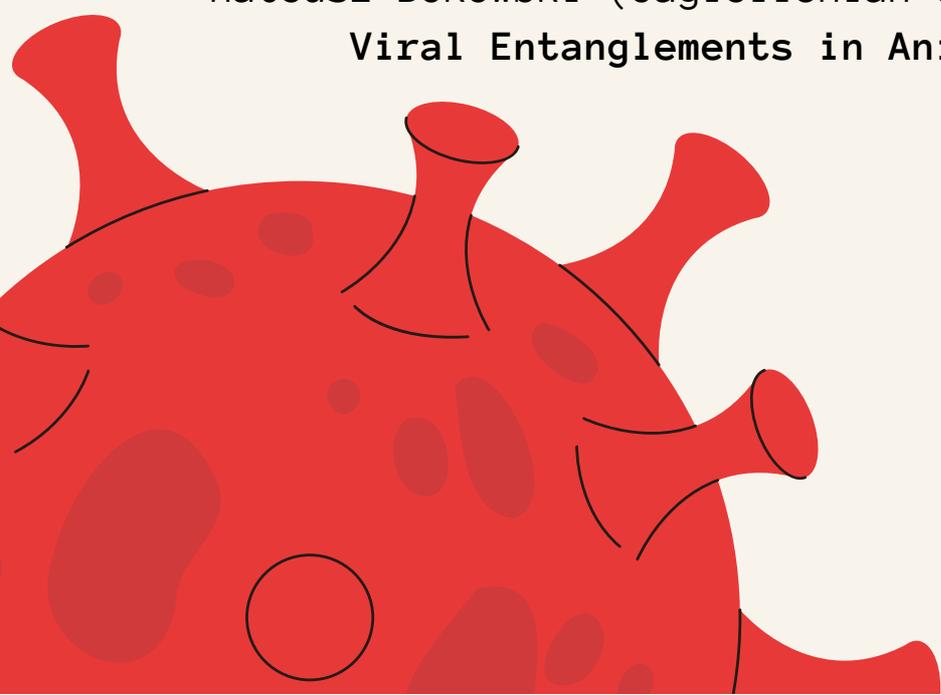
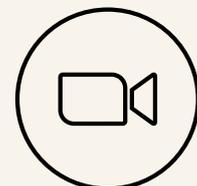
Pei-Ying LIN (Eindhoven University of Technology)

Building Up Cultural Understanding of Viruses Through Embodiment Experiences

Mateusz BOROWSKI (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

Viral Entanglements in Animated Worlds

ZOOM link:



PROGRAMME

DAY 3

(OCTOBER 21, 2022)

4:00 – 5:30 pm (GMT+2)

Tony D SAMPSON (University of East London)

Immunity, Community and Contagion: Three Propositions

6:00 – 8:00 pm (GMT+2)

Jonathon TURNBULL (University of Cambridge),

Adam SEARLE (Université de Liège)

**Rethinking Nature amidst COVID-19: Insurgent Nature,
Resurgent Natures, and Anthropause Environmentalisms**

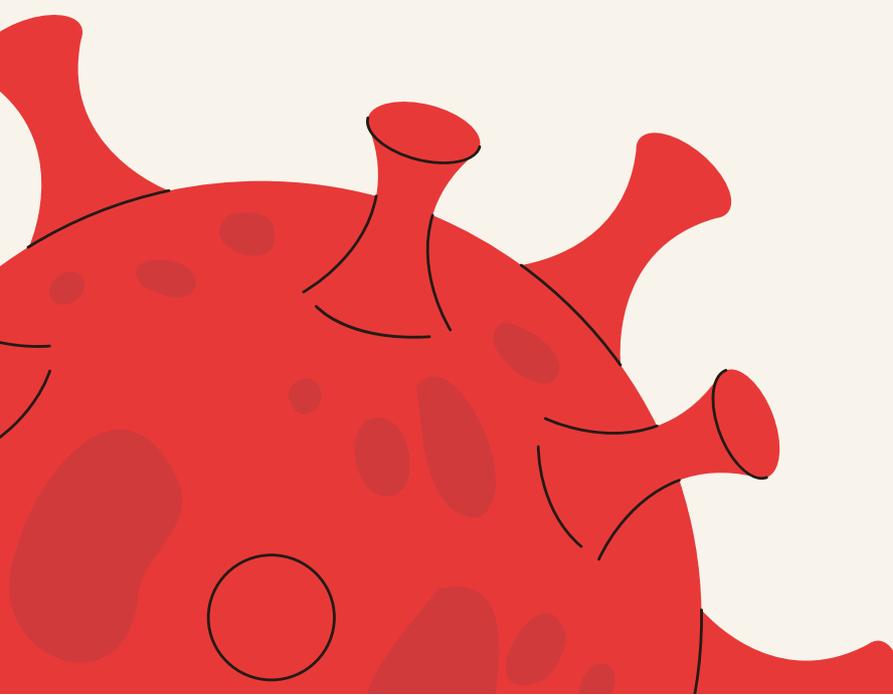
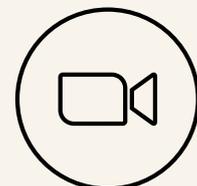
Karolina ŻYNIIEWICZ (University of Warsaw)

Viral Collaborations – Infectious Relations

Mateusz CHABERSKI (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

**Between Contingency and Recurrence. Virality after the
Collapse of the Political Event**

ZOOM link:



Adam NOCEK (Arizona State University)

Seeing Too Much COVID: On Viruses, Immunity, and Epistemic Media

This talk takes as its point of departure the deluge of computer-generated images and animations of the SARS-CoV-2 virus. In particular, the paper situates the strong correlation between “seeing” and “knowing” in the life sciences within a wider biomedical security landscape and contends that our ongoing struggle to prevent severe COVID-19 infection redraws the relation between epistemic media in biomedicine and its militarization. While the all-too-familiar images of SARS-CoV-2 have gone a long way toward giving the virus a “visual identity” in the public imaginary, I argue that they are ultimately fueled by highly rationalized technologies of biomedical security fixated on visualizing, targeting, and defending against the “invisible enemy.” The paper contends that these hyper-militarized technologies of visualization (closely aligned to what Paul Virilio calls the “optical ballistics”) are not without their deep, genealogical connections to biomedical knowledge production in the West—i.e., “knowing through seeing” (Evelyn Fox Keller, *Making Sense of Life* 2002). In this way I discuss how visualization technologies have played an essential role in stitching together biomedical knowledge and militarization, and how this is on full display with the flood of images depicting the virus’ spike proteins and the host’s neutralizing antibodies, significantly enhanced by mRNA vaccines. With these elements, the battlefield for the visual-epistemic “war on COVID-19” is set.

Still, despite the significant gains made in immunological defense, the rate at which the virus’ spike structure has mutated and evaded the body’s trained production of antibodies (through mRNA vaccines), just reconfirms what many immunologists already know: the virus-host interaction is complex, which is to say, involves multiple layers of immunity (e.g., not just antibodies, but T-cell immunity, etc.), which develop over an organism’s life-history in relation to shifting environments (i.e., ecological immunity), and which cannot be modeled using algorithms that map probability distributions in advance. What’s

KEY-NOTE

more, the difference between mild and severe COVID turns out to be a matter of how “coordinated” one’s immune system is, and whether there is enough “synchronicity” or “harmony” among its many layers to ward off severe disease. These relationships are specific to the historicity of the organism’s development in relation to its many environments, and do not lend themselves to general models of robust immune defense.

I end the talk by reflecting on how such an eco-immunological frame for virus-host interaction challenges the reigning paradigms of biomedical security and the visualization technologies that fuel them. While this does not mean upending the tight relationship between knowledge production and visualization in the biomedical sciences, it does mean reconceiving the grammar of visual epistemology in these sciences, so that oversimplified logics of biomedical security that place a premium on visualizing, targeting, and defending against the enemy are undermined. In their place, I offer examples of epistemic media that foster variation over time, and relationships punctuated by interstices, blind spots, and gaps in the visual field that do not find tidy resolutions that can be generalized.

Adam Nocek is an Associate Professor in the Philosophy of Technology and Director of the Center for Philosophical Technologies at Arizona State University. He has published widely on the philosophy of science and design, speculative philosophy, and critical and speculative theories of computational media. Nocek is also Clinical Assistant Professor at the Creighton University School of Medicine.

LECTURES

Tony D SAMPSON (University of East London)

Immunity, Community and Contagion: Three Propositions

The focus of my talk falls on the immunity problem. It will be structured around three interrelated propositions, inspired by what Roger Caillois considered to be the doubly dangerous luxuries of collective mimicry. Each proposition will show how immunologic becomes interwoven with the logics of community and contagion. The first is initially informed by the technical failure of social media to effectively force immunological exemptions and subsequently halt e.g., contagious racism on social media. The second concerns the resurgence of a perilous kind of immunopolitics implicated in the interwoven logics of immunity, community and contagion. Finally, the third proposition returns to Caillois's notion of collective mimicry, exploring its potential to lure organisms towards environmental assimilation.

Tony D Sampson is a critical theorist with an interest in philosophies of media technology. His publications include *The Spam Book* (Hampton Press, 2009), *Virality* (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), *The Assemblage Brain* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), *Affect and Social Media* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2018) and *A Sleepwalker's Guide to Social Media* (Polity, 2020). Tony is the host and organizer of the Affect and Social Media international conferences in east London and a co-founder of the public engagement initiative the Cultural Engine Research Group. He works as a reader in digital media cultures and communication at the University of East London. He blogs at: <https://viralcontagion.blog/>

KEY-NOTE

Astrid SCHRADER (University of Exeter)

Thinking with Marine Viruses as Elemental Ghosts

Not all viruses are our enemies. While their status as living entities remains contested, viruses are essential for life on earth. Turning to the role of viruses in the global carbon cycle, this paper explores how the agencies of marine viruses trouble the distinction between life and nonlife and prompt us to rethink the connection between 'agency' and 'life'. Drawing on Elizabeth Povinelli's critique of our 'carbon imaginary'—the governance of life through a fundamental distinction between life and nonlife—and Jacques Derrida's notion of haunting, I argue that the anthropocentric figures that emerged from a Foucauldian biopolitics are in need of replacement in a time of environmental crisis. Combining the sociopolitical figure of the Virus with a biogeochemical one, I am after a more hopeful biopolitics that figures viruses as 'elemental ghosts'.

Astrid Schrader is a senior lecturer at the University of Exeter in the department of Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology. She works at the intersections of feminist science studies, human-animal studies, new materialisms, and posthumanist theories. Her work explores questions of responsibility, care and agency in scientific knowledge production, new ontologies, the relationship between anthropocentrism and conceptions of time, and questions of environmental justice. Astrid has been particularly interested in scientific research on marine microbes. Under the heading of "Caring with Haunted Microbes" she develops new theoretical approaches in STS, combining 'agential realism' and 'biodeconstruction'. Working with artists and marine scientists, she also seeks to develop new approaches to and methodologies in cross-disciplinarity.

LECTURES

ABSTRACTS

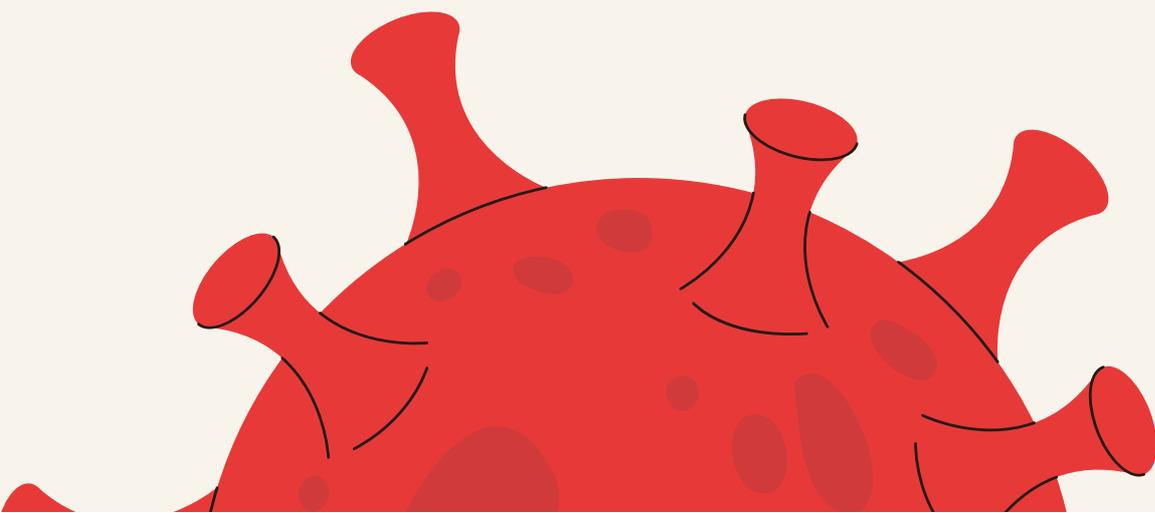


Mateusz BOROWSKI (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

Viral Entanglements in Animated Worlds

The paper starts from the assumption, put forward by numerous researchers, that any representation of viral pathogens is at the same time their conceptualization, i.e. a material-semiotic knot which inevitably profiles some features of the pathogen and diminishes or hides others. Thus conceived, representation of a virus stands not only for its structural features but also overtly or implicitly for how it impacts and affects both individual organism and the collective body on population level. It was particularly COVID-19 pandemic that spawned a host of approaches in critical theories that emphasize the following point: significant re-emerging viral diseases are in fact manifestations of residual human and more-than-human entanglements typical of the Anthropocene and its ideologies of colonial extraction (Elizabeth Povinelli). In this respect opportunistic pathogens provide an instance of Anthropocenic proliferation, as opposed to Holocenic resurgence of livable inter-species arrangements (Anna L. Tsing). This emergence of viral pathogens from Anthropocenic/colonial entanglements typically evades the means of molecular capture in normative, medical and biological contexts, where the digital machinery of animation provides the main means of representing and conceptualizing viruses.

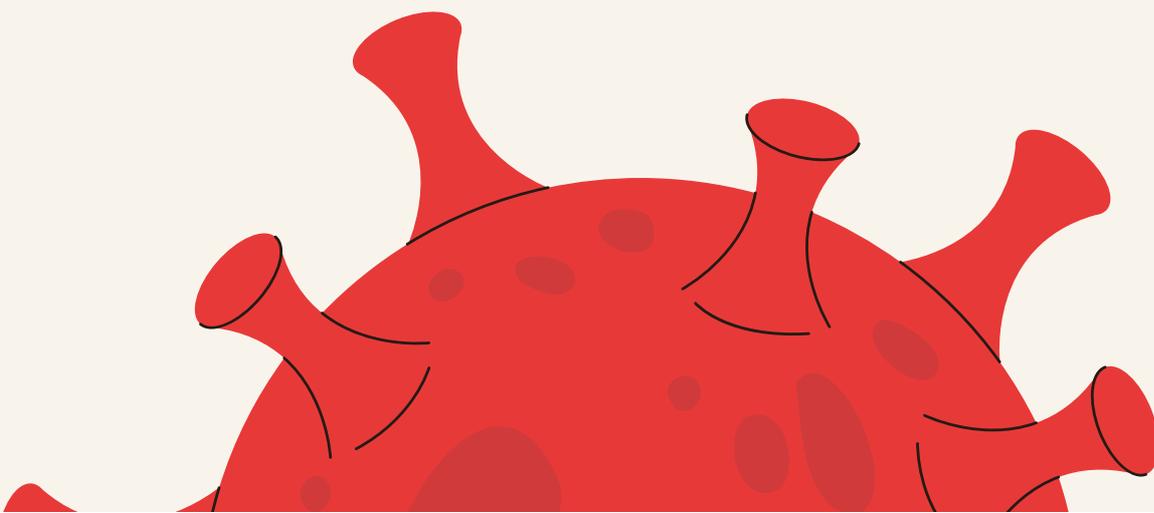
However, as the paper argues, those entanglements are thematized in other products of this machinery—in animated feature films, which often provide narratives and imagery steeped in these Anthropocenic entanglements.



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Drawing on the extant readings of animated films as subversive cultural narratives which undermine the dominant ideologies of Western modernity (J. Halberstam), I will take a closer look at three examples: the French series *Once Upon a Time... Life* (1987), the American animated thriller *Osmosis Jones* (2001) and the Japanese anime series *Cells at Work!* (2018). These examples show the micro-processes in human body using the conventions of popular cinema, and conceptualizing immunological response in terms of various types of human and more-than-human conflicts and co-operations typical of each era. By looking closely at those conceptualizations, I will read for the relationships between representations of virus and the larger entanglements from which they emerge; entanglements represented and hinted at in each of these examples in a different way.

Mateusz Borowski is a Professor at the Department for Performativity Studies at the Jagiellonian University, Kraków. He holds a PhD from Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany and the Jagiellonian University. Currently his main areas of interest are the history and sociology of science, and counterfactual narratives in historiography and memory studies and speculative fabulations in the context of climate change. He recently published *Strategies of Forgetting: Memory and Cyberculture* (2015) and, with Małgorzata Sugiera, *Artificial Natures. Performances of Technoscience and Arts* (2017). He is currently leading the research project *After Climate Crisis. Non-Scalable Survival Strategies in Speculative Fabulations of the Last Two Decades* (2022–2026) funded by the Polish National Science Center.

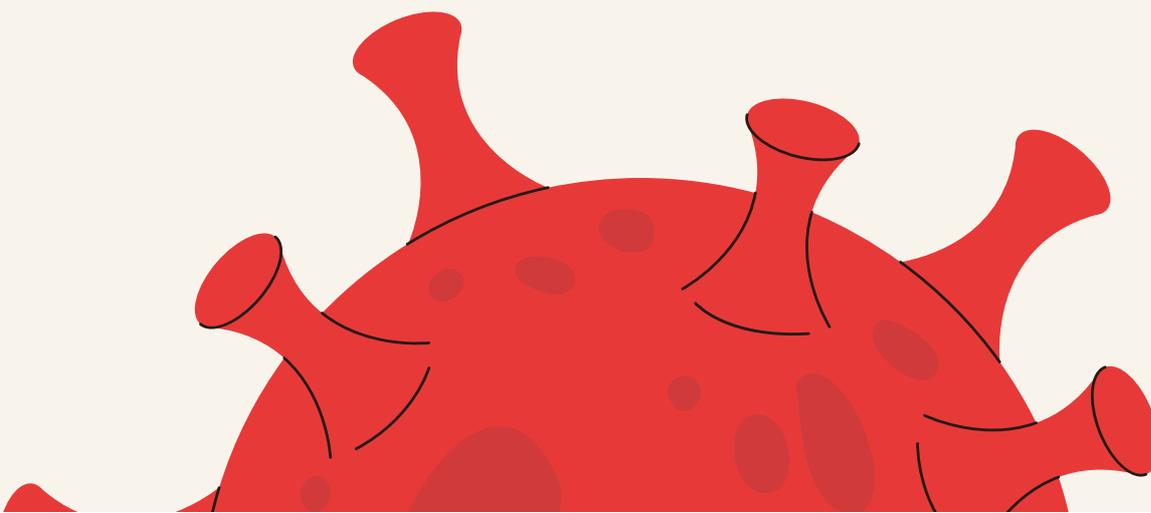


ABSTRACTS

 Mateusz CHABERSKI (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)
Between Contingency and Recurrence. Virality after the Collapse of the Political Event

In her latest work *Between Gaia and Ground. Four Axioms of Existence and the Ancestral Catastrophe of Late Liberalism* (2021) Elizabeth Povinelli claims that the more-than-human entanglement of existence, recognized by new materialist theorists (Barad 2008; Haraway 2008), has called for a radical redefinition of the political event. In the Anthropocene, the political event defined as that which structurally transforms a given arrangement of existence with potentially universal reach, erupts into myriad quasi-events, micro-events and intensities of political import. This in turn entails new ways of thinking about viruses and contagion as vectors of social and political change.

Taking Povinelli's work as its vantage point, this paper proposes contingency and recurrence as two points of orientation in thinking with the political temporality of virality across the natural, the cultural and the technological (Sampson 2011). Contingency attunes to the specificity and indeterminacy of viral encounter while recurrence points to periodic yet unpredictable rhythms of virality. Drawing on variegated case studies ranging from digital virals to novels (e.g. Hanya Yanagihara's 2021 *To Paradise*), the paper focuses on difference forms of more-than-human socialities and political governance staged by contingent and recurrent viral encounters.



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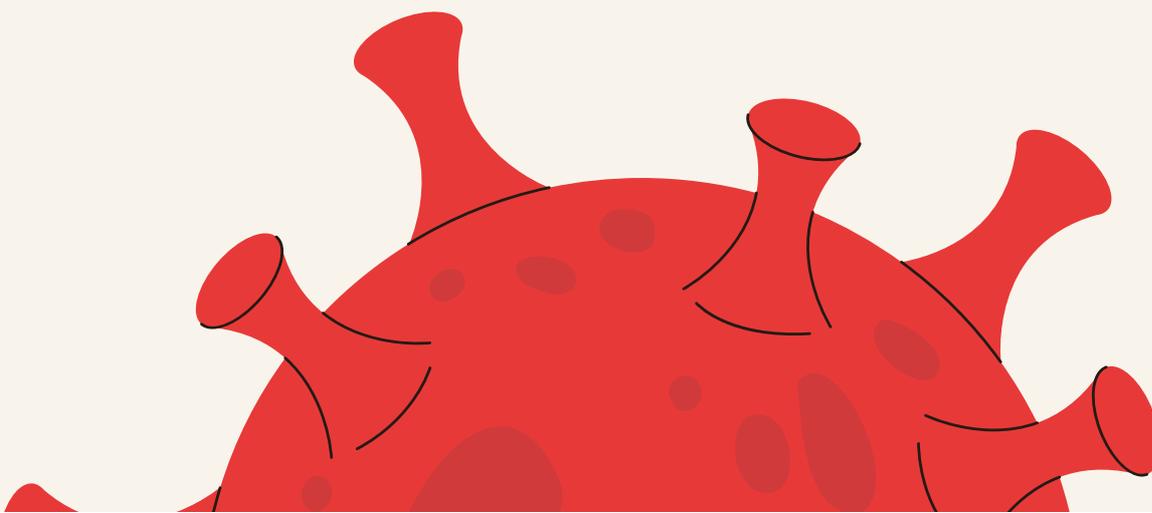
Mateusz Chaberski is Assistant Professor in the Department for Performativity Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. In 2016 he won a Foundation for Polish Science scholarship for innovative research in Humanities. His academic interests range from performance studies, affect, and assemblage theories to Anthropocene studies. In 2015, he published *Doświadczenie (syn)estetyczne. Performatywne aspekty przedstawień ((Syn)aesthetic Experience: Performative Aspects of Site-Specific Performance)* and in 2019 *Asamblaże, Asamblaże. Doświadczenie w zamglonym antropocenie (Assemblages, Assemblages: Experience in the Foggy Anthropocene)*. Together with Mateusz Borowski and Małgorzata Sugiera, he co-edited *Emerging Affinities: Possible Futures of Performative Arts* (Transcript Verlag 2019) and with Ewa Bal *Situated Knowing: Epistemic Perspectives on Performance* (Routledge 2020).



Łukasz KIEŁPIŃSKI (University of Warsaw)

Managing the Ambiguities – Masculinity and HIV in Polish 1990s Cinema

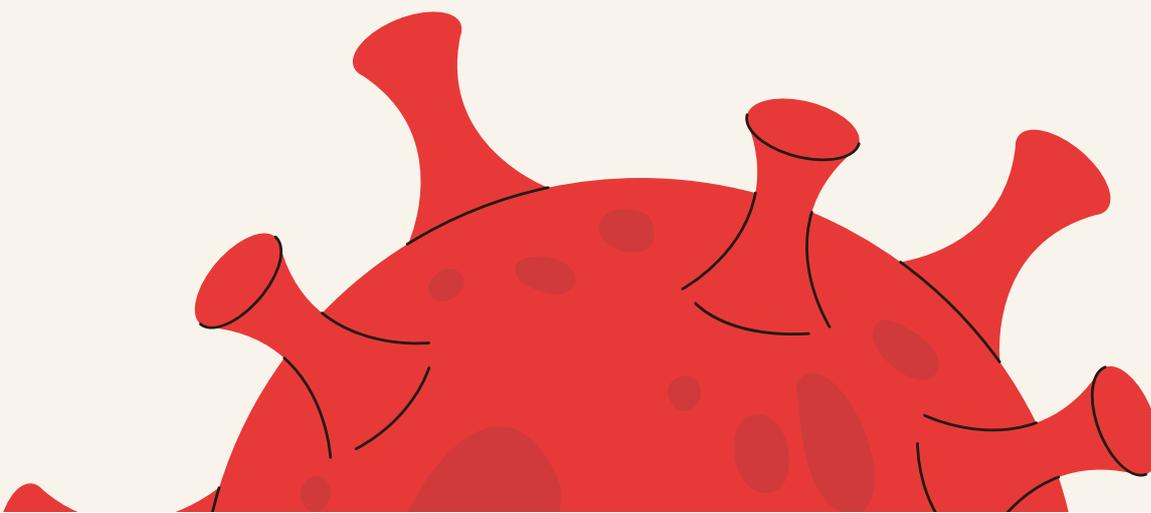
There is a popular thesis within Polish film studies that the 1990s was an era of gangster films and macho man was the leading male figure of these times. The paradigmatic example of such cinema is Władysław Pasikowski's *Dogs (Psy, 1992)* and the following films with the central role of Franz Mauer, played by Bogusław Linda. The logic of hyper-masculinity of the 1990s was based on a paranoid avoidance of anything that was feminine, soft or ambiguous. Barbara Keff writes that Polish macho model „does not include positive sexuality, there is no body in it, so instead in his own body, a macho lives in a rigid armour of the desired gender image”. This is a model of a male identity symptomatic of



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the times of political and social crisis. Homogenous, unaffected masculinity is supposed to be an oasis of stability and security in the world overtaken by decay and the atmosphere of decline. This was previously illustrated by Klaus Theweleit who in *Males Fantasies* (1987) has shown that the Other of the Nazi soldier was everything that—in opposition to the rigid frames of the uniform—embodied passivity, pollution, stickiness, and dirt. The cultural association of these qualities with essentialized femininity makes the only legitimate subject of the time of crisis for the tough man. In Polish cinema, the hard shell of ruthless strength provided men with an illusion of agency and stability in a new, capitalist world corrupted by the logic of mere profit.

However, in the landscape of the highly patriarchal and sexist Polish cinematography of the 1990s, there is a film which escapes the macho pattern by showing a male, homosexual body infected with an HIV. *It is Time for Witches* (*Pora na czarownice*, 1993) directed by Piotr Łazarkiewicz. The body infected with the virus embodies everything which is socially stigmatized and throughout this act of abjection, the sick body symbolically cleanses social body from everything evil or dangerous. In the world depicted as hostile and unpredictable, paradoxically only an infected male body was represented as gentle and caring – very different from the reigning macho model. Drawing on Theweleit's schizoanalytical recognitions regarding the relationship between a male body and a feeling of ambiguity in time of crises, I would like to see what this particular representation of a homosexual, HIV-infected male body says about the relations between macho masculinity of the 1990s and the fear of being contaminated by something dangerous from the outside. Was the male protagonist of Łazarkiewicz's



film really infected with HIV or was it just a symbol of femininity and homosexuality? And if so, how should we interpret the ending of the film where he ends up being burned down in the building that was set on fire? Assuming that the representation of HIV in Łazarkiewicz's film says a lot about the model of masculinity in the 1990s without meaning that, I intend to examine the film as a source of knowledge not about how HIV was consciously understood, but how it circulated as an unconscious, collective notion.

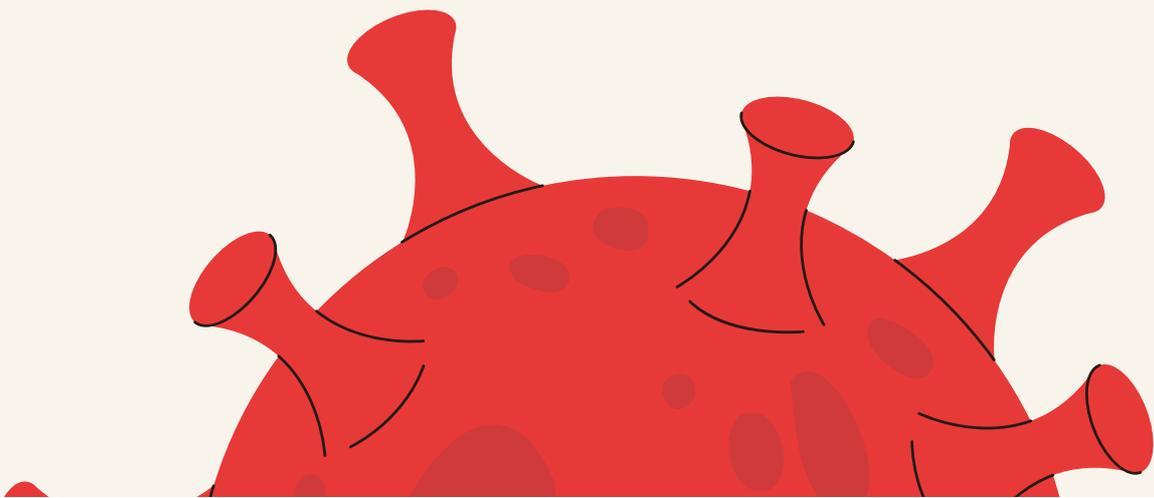
Łukasz Kielpiński – graduate student of Visual Culture at the Institute of Polish Culture and Psychotherapy at the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Warsaw. Member of Collegium Invisibile. He has published in 'Kwartalnik Filmowy', 'EKRAŃY' and 'Pleograf'. Co-Investigator in OPUS research grant “Odmieńcy. Performances of otherness in Polish transition culture” funded by the Polish National Science Centre. His academic interests involve contemporary cinema, affect theory and autobiography studies.



Pei-Ying LIN (Eindhoven University of Technology)

Building up Cultural Understanding of Viruses through Embodiment Experiences

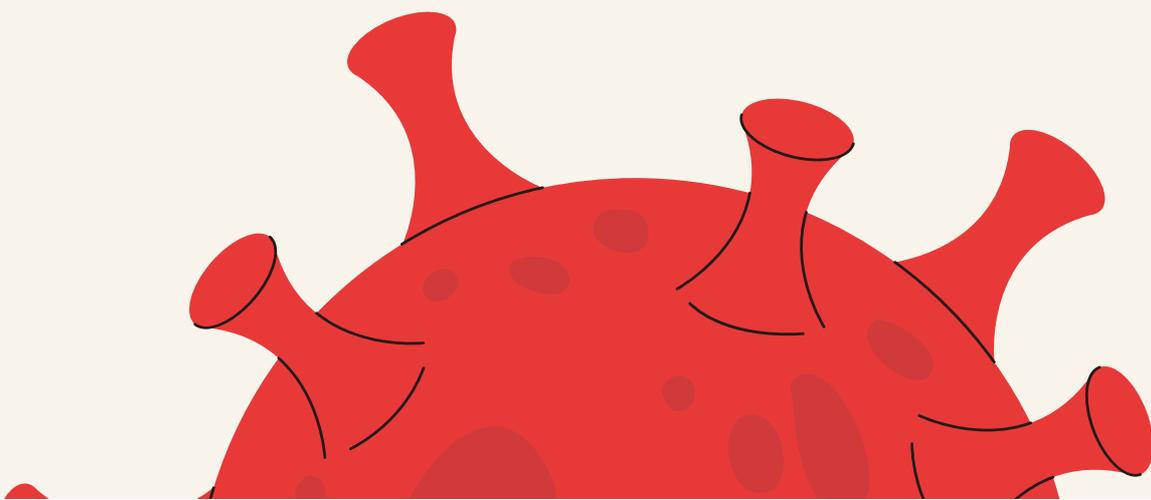
As the pandemic has awoken us to how humans as abiological beings are connected and influenced by the tiny microorganisms such as viruses, it also reveals how little we know about these semi-living beings, and how little we have developed culturally towards dealing with them. And that brings about frustration. There is a range of interspecies relationships humans have established through millions of years of biological and



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cultural efforts. We might find it comparatively easy to understand animals, like many people who consider their pets as family members and are comforted by them. But in comparison with dogs, wolves are a bit more difficult. Insects are perhaps a little bit harder, and so are plants. After Leeuwenhoek invented the microscope, the world of microorganisms is revealed to us, where for a moment people were in awe at the delicacy and vibranc of these unseen to a naked eye. Early 20th-century Dutch virologist M. W. Beijerinck founded the area of virology through the study of Tobacco Mosaic virus. The human-virus relationship officially entered human awareness. However, in 2020 we still lack cultural toolkits to enable us to understand these little biological beings without either being merely scientific or religious (shamanic), and the 'language' we know to describe the viruses is inherited from the epistemological root of pathogen research in the early 20th century.

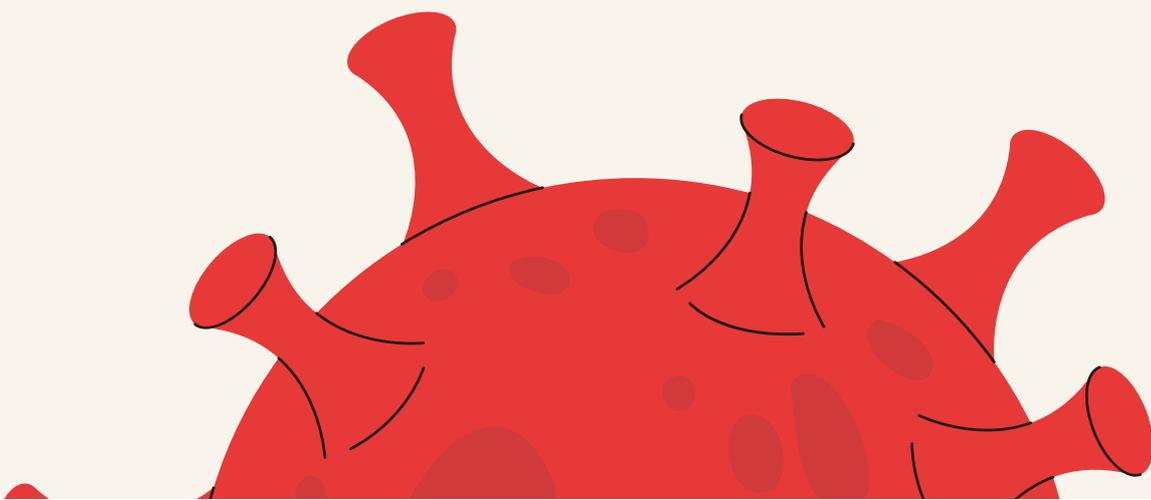
As an urge to bring the public out of the typical human-centric, virus-as-merely-pathogens narrative, my virus projects are a series of exploration of using various artistic embodiment strategies to explore how we can understand viruses and build different relationships with them. I would like to share the trajectory of explorations: 1) 'Tame is to Tame' - an attempt to think about how we can 'tame' the viruses and let viruses tame us. 2) 'Virophilia' - a thought experiment of using viruses for culinary pleasure accompanied by food performances. 3) 'Studies of Interbeing - Trance 1:1' - translating the cellular mechanism of virus replication into knitting as a way to understand the microscopic protein synthesis at the human scale, through which to build a ritualistic platform for us to talk about the COVID-19 pandemic. 4) 'Studies of Interbeing - Pedigree X' - a search inwards to look at



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ourselves as a chimera of viruses through analysis of endogenous viruses and metagenomics.

Pei-Ying Lin is an artist / designer from Taiwan and currently based in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. She is a PhD Candidate in the department of Industrial Engineering and Innovation Science, and the department of Industrial Design at Eindhoven University of Technology. Her major current research is to combine the non-human perspective into human-AI collaborations. She also holds a MA in Design Interactions from Royal College of Art, UK and a BSc in Life Science, minor in Computer Science as well as Humanities and Social Sciences (Cultural Studies) from National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. Her main focus is on the combination of science and human society through artistic methods, and is particularly interested in building a common discussion ground for different cultural perspectives regarding elements that construct our individual perception of the world. Recently she has been focusing on manipulating the boundary of invisible/visible, living/non-living and finding ways to build tools and methods that facilitate such explorations. She has established the Taiwanese BioArt Community with friends from 2012 and is one of the first promoter of BioArt in Taiwan. She has won the Honorary Mention of STARTS Prize 2020, Honorary Mention in Hybrid Arts Category of Ars Electronica 2015, Professional Runner Up in Speculative Concepts of Core 77 Awards 2015, BioArt and Design Award 2016. Her project PSX Consultancy is a permanent collection of Museum of Architecture and Design, Slovenia.



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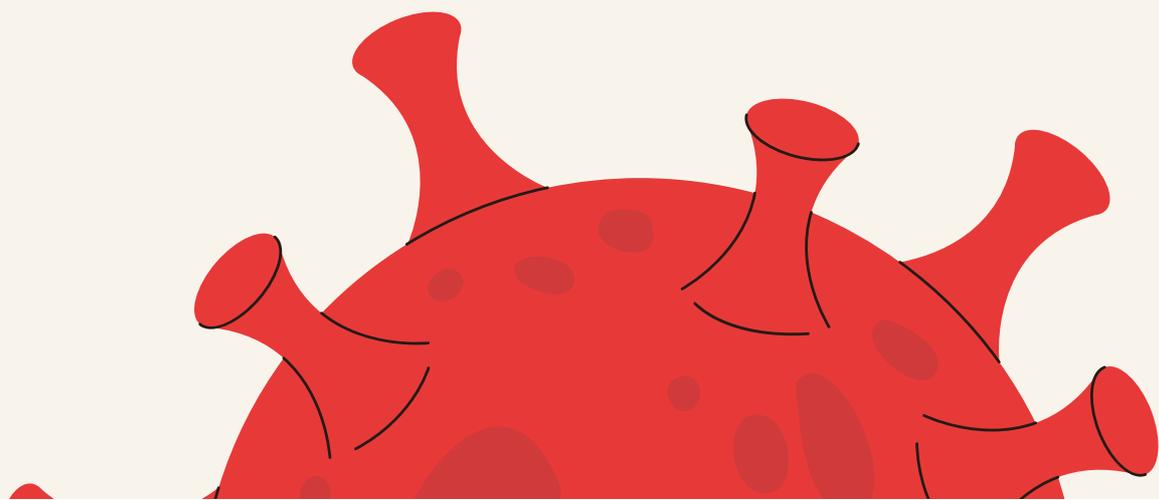


Jakub PAWLAK (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

Indigenous Social Practice as a Blood-Borne Virus. Sámi Artistic Autoethnographies of Bodies that Carry and Bleed Heritage

In social practice theory, homo practicus becomes the focus of the investigation. They are often defined as a carrier of social practices or a body that carries practices and at the same time is carried by them. Although it seems unintentional, the word “carrier” hints at the possibility of interpreting social practices as social viruses; practices both inhabit a body, co-shape it, and spread from one to another, in collectives as well as incidentally. “Virus” might occur as yet another biological metaphor used to describe embodying the social, alongside “DNA” and “blood”, but, in contrast, it allows us to speak of a process instead of a state. It indicates that one “does” a socialised body and not just “is” or “has” this body. The difference seems especially striking in the context of indigenous bodies, such as North European Sámi, whose ethnicity in traditional ethnographic discourses is tied to essentialising ancestral blood. In my paper, while not denying the blood its agency in emergence of ethnic identities, I introduce a metaphor of a blood-borne virus and explore several Sámi artistic autoethnographies through its lens.

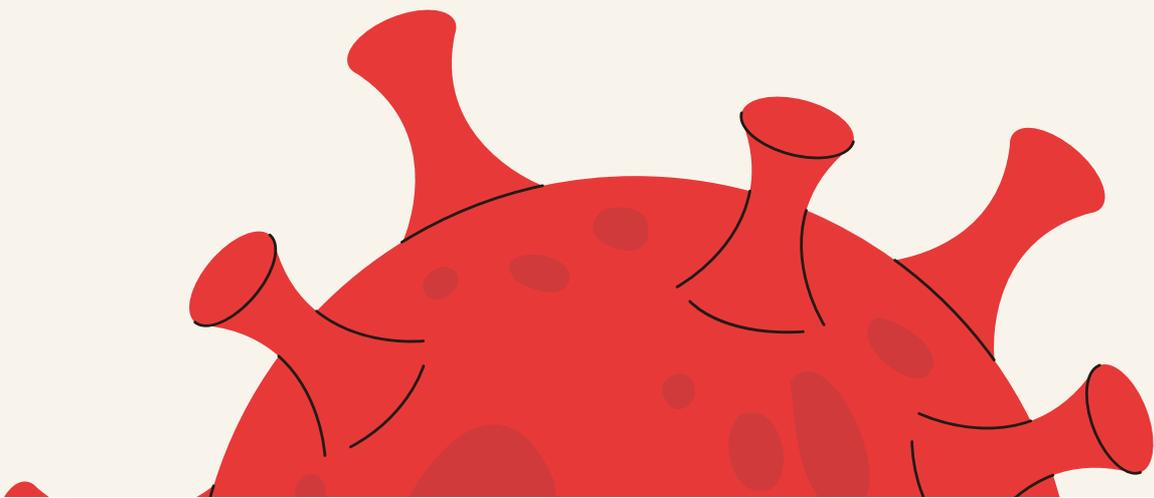
First, the analysis will serve to underline the performative nature of embodying heritage and test the usefulness of thinking with the (blood-borne) virus metaphor in the field of indigenous studies and social practice theory. Second, it will answer the question of how autoethnographies incorporated in the discussed examples counteract ethnic discrimination and promote alternate identity politics.



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I start my exploration with *Sámi Blood* (2017), a quasi-autoethnographic film directed by Amanda Kernell. *Sámi Blood* is a fictional story of Elle Marja who was born in a Sámi village in Northern Sweden in the 1910s and grew up facing the country's racial politics. Here, embodied social practices become the main reason to discriminate against Sámi bodies; blood-related kinship is what defines both ethnic identities, social hierarchy, and the mobility of the "carriers". Other discussed autoethnographic Sámi accounts, most current and informed by the COVID-19 pandemic, can be found in various works at the exhibition *Landscapes of Belonging* (2022, Berlin). A common denominator for these works is the approach to emergence of ethnic identities. Instead of tracing literal blood ancestry, the presented projects treat ethnicity as site-specificity, an ever-ongoing process of becoming part and parcel of specific more-than-human social assemblages. Blood-related kinship is not a prerequisite to this process; it has mostly to do with becoming a "carrier" of social practices considered ethnic or indigenous, even if ancestry plays a part in it.

Jakub Pawlak graduated in Performativity Studies and Swedish Philology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. He continues his studies as a PhD candidate in the Doctoral School in the Humanities, JU, while being a member of the research team of the NCN OPUS 21 project *Normality under uncertainty. Praxeological approach in research on the (re)production of 'normal' urban life* (2022-). His main research interests are autobiographic and autoethnographic performances, speculative designs, Nordic neoshamanic practices and decolonial ecologies.



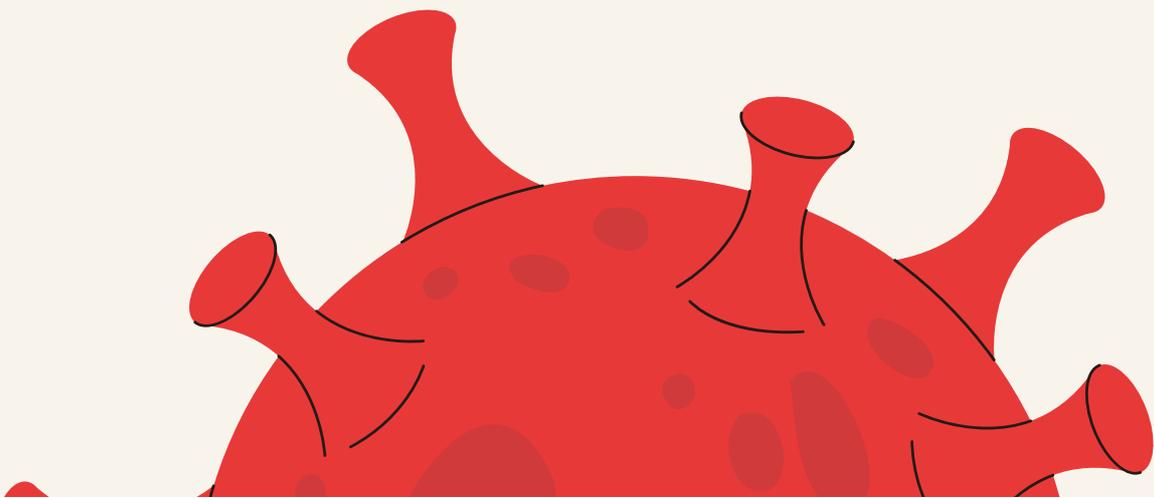
ABSTRACTS



Filip RYBA (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warszawa)

Virusing of Western Knowledge: A New Perspective on Provincializing, Locality, and Practices of Cognition

It has been more than twenty years since Dipesh Chakrabarty proposed the practice of provincializing Europe which was the strategy of decentralizing Western project of universal knowledge. What has been questionable is his status as a historian that has not been problematized alongside history. In his new, planetary reflection, Chakrabarty tries to imagine the emergent status of his discipline which takes account of other, broader temporalities. What is unimaginable for him, is a total decay of history. Even if his practices are not sufficiently emancipatory and radical, they somehow erode the hegemony of Western knowledge. This is also true for approaches that use local perspective to disrupt the monopoly of the scientific practices of cognition, such as the ontological turn and indigenous studies. These strategies may be fueled by the epoch of the possible end of the world, the Anthropocene, and the constant sense of living on the edge of time. This appears to be a hospitable environment for this kind of cognition, which is able to firmly impact the seemingly white or Western access to truth. This idea inspired me to imagine these approaches as viruses – nonobvious entities, which have equally nonobvious agency. I would like to point out how the virusing of Western monopoly on true cognition is a proper way not only to transfigure the project of knowledge, which is still seen as a repository of truth, but also to cope with present and future crises in the very pragmatic sense.



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Filip Ryba – a doctoral student at the Anthropos Doctoral School of the Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, an activist, member of the Undisciplined Anthropology Unit (Institute of Archeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences), Collegium Invisibile, and Inspireurope branch in Krakow. His research focuses on the modernity of the Middle East in a posthuman and postmodern perspective with reference to postcolonial studies. He also cooperates with the (pop)cultural journal "Popmoderna".

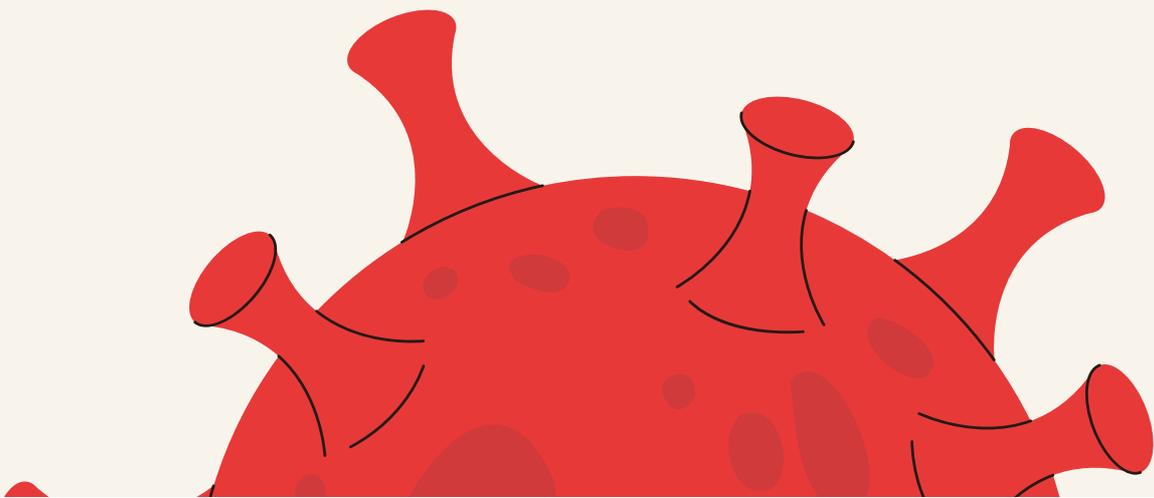


Dorota SOSNOWSKA (University of Warsaw)

Performing HIV/AIDS–Biopolitics and Capitalism in Post–Communist Poland

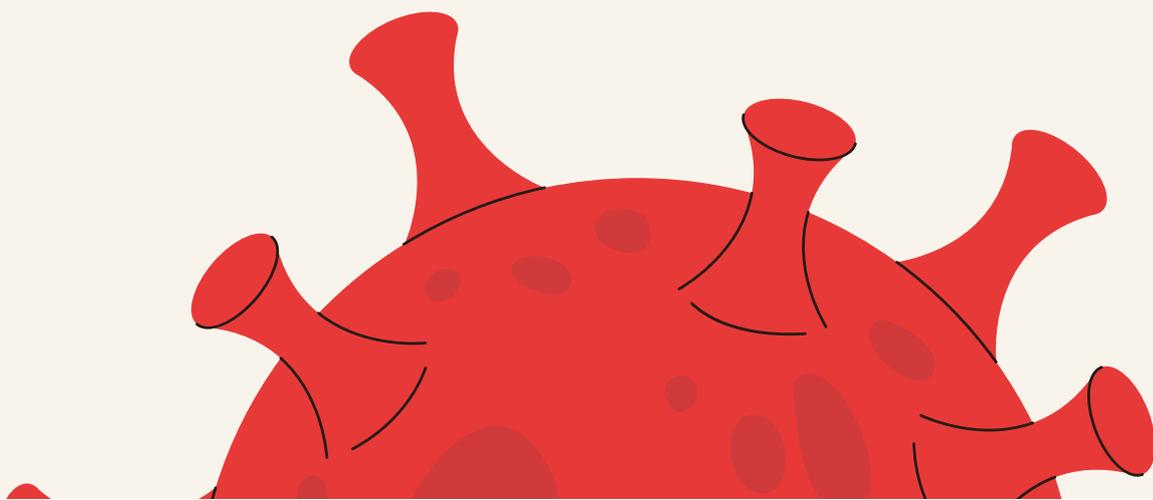
Tony Kushner's drama *Angels in America* staged by Krzysztof Warlikowski in 2007 became one of the most significant performances of Polish theater after 1989. As Bryce Lease writes in his book *After '89 Polish Theater and the Political* (2016):

Warlikowski's revolutionary staging was a direct attempt to correct the lack of a specific gay emancipation movement in Poland, [...] Warkocki claims that this was the most important production of the first decade of the 21st century. Warlikowski's expressive staging provoked a new public discussion on homosexuality, allowing for a key representative counter–discourse against Kaczyński's neo–conservative Fourth Republic and established a widely identified historical turn in the treatment and reception of homosexuality and HIV/AIDS.



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Thus, the performance, especially in its dimension, which relates to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, created an image of the disease in Polish culture and defined the role of theatre and theatricality in the face of the biocapital, taking over the bodies of Polish citizens. However, Kushner's play had two more earlier productions on Polish stages: in 1995 in Gdańsk (by Wojciech Nowak) and in 2000 in Toruń (by Marek Fiedor) which produced different political meanings. Analyzing the three performances, I would like to ask what it means to enact AIDS on stage? What different models of body and corporeality emerge from these performances? What forms of theatrical politics are evoked by the theme of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in post-communist Poland? There are many indications that the epidemic has no local face. In the 1980s it was pushed to the margins of social awareness. In the 1990s, HIV/AIDS reached Poland as an element of Western culture intricately linked to the new capitalist and biopolitical order. Following other artworks and cultural references to HIV/AIDS appearing between 1990 and 2007 in Poland, I would like to ask what is an AIDS performance and what is its political potential? How capitalist biopolitics—different from communist one—exists in tension with epidemic's theatrical and artistic imaginary and what kinds of bodies it produces? The most interesting question is about the subversive potential of those theatrical realizations: how biopolitics, politics anchored in biopower and regulating bodily existence of citizens in new capitalist context, is deconstructed by the fact of playing, performing AIDS? In this context Susan Sontag's "illness as metaphor" (1991) does not seem applicable anymore. We should rather speak about mirroring the western culture's view of epidemy by performing and re-performing its matterphor (*Elemental Ecocriticism: Thinking with Earth, Air, Water and Fire*, eds. Cohen Jeffrey Jerome,



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Lowell Dukert, 2015): body with virus. I would like to analyze those gestures in the cultural context of the political transition in Poland and ask about their ambiguity.

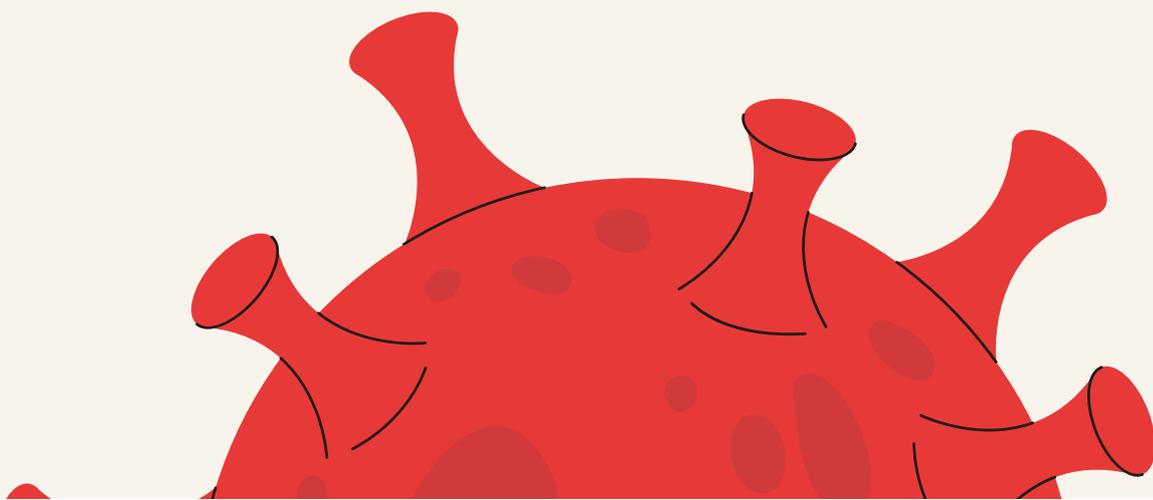
Dorota Sosnowska is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Polish Culture (Department of Theatre and Performance) at University of Warsaw. The author of the book about three actresses of the communist period in Poland entitled *Królowe PRL. Sceniczne wizerunki Ireny Eichlerówny, Niny Andrycz i Elżbiety Barszczewskiej jako modele kobiecości* (2014). She took part in the scientific projects devoted to the problem of performance documentation, theoretical status of sources, archives and documents in performance studies (“Sources and Mediations”) and performance and memory (“Performing Memory”). She published articles on the subject in Polish and international journals such as *Performance Research* or *Maska* and co-edited a book devoted to the memory of worker’s theatre (*Robotnik. Performanse pamięci*, 2017). Now she is working as principal investigator on the project *Odmieńcy. Performances of otherness in Polish transition culture* and co-investigator in the project *Epidemics and communities in critical theories, artistic practices and speculative fabulations of last decades* – both financed from the Polish National Science Center. She is a co-convenor of the Theatre Historiography group and a member of IFTR from 2016



Małgorzata SUGIERA (Jagiellonian University)

Another Evolution: Speculating about Viruses and Life on Earth

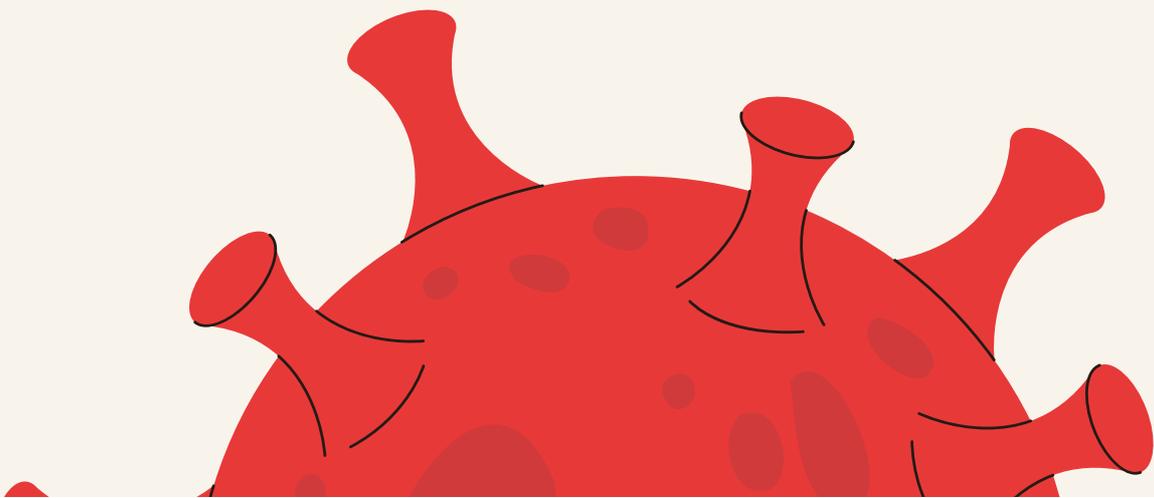
The paper starts with a closer look at an enigmatic prologue of Ridley Scott’s *Prometheus* (2012) which has engendered contrary interpretations.



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A teaser poster, released a few months before the movie premiere, had a significant tagline: “The search for our beginning could lead to our end.” For this reason the imagined beginning plays a key-role here. The first sequence of Scott’s *Prometheus* shows a spacecraft departing a lifeless planet, leaving behind a humanoid alien who in a sacrificial act takes poison, causing the body and its double helix of DNA to fall apart. Shortly after that the DNA recombines, and life on Earth may begin. This common description lacks, however, one vital detail present in the prologue—a black swarm of viruses which causes both death of the alien and life on the planet. Clearly, without the viruses the act of creation would be impossible.

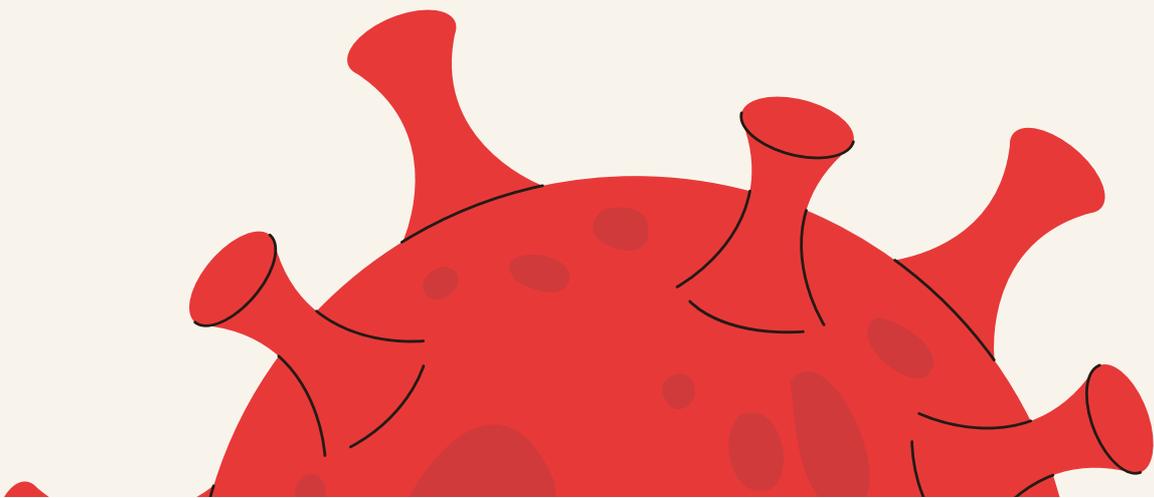
The opening of Scott’s movie introduces a perspective in which the paper engages critically with Elizabeth Povinelli’s neoliberal figure of the Virus (including all kind of pathogenic agents) through a reading of two novel cycles, both informed by legitimate science, and written at turn of the 21st century: Greg Bear’s duology *Darwin’s Radio* (1999) and *Darwin’s Children* (2003) as well as Peter Watts’s *Rifters* trilogy (1999–2004). Bear’s cycle focuses on the unfolding of a deadly plague of a new form of endogenous retrovirus, killing human fetuses in the womb. However, an apparent end of human species turns out to be a new phase in human evolution, leading to speciation. Importantly, the author shows this also by flashbacks of the time when a former speciation took place and the evolving genus *Homo sapiens sapiens* replaced preceding species of archaic humans. While Bear interprets the “awaking” of some non-coding sequences of human DNA as a necessary adaptive response to overcrowding and limited to the human population, Watts noticeably broadens the perspective of what evolution means and how closely interrelated its currents are. Firstly, deep within the Juan de Fuca



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rift, an ancient, sulphur-dependent nanobacterium is discovered in hydrothermal vents and starts spreading globally. It has an alternative genetic template of p-RNA and, therefore, could mean the end of all life on the surface. Secondly, during a deadly pandemic Watts shows futuristic human behavior-modification technology premised on gene-tweaking and neurochemistry as well as the Internet as a wild ecosystem capable of the evolution of virtual life which deeply impacts human civilization. A close reading of both cycles allows me to come back to Prometheus's prologue, tackling the key-question of this paper-how the way we imagine our beginning changes the way we imagine an imminent apocalypse of our world.

Małgorzata Sugiera is a Full Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Poland, and Head of the Department for Performativity Studies. She was a Research Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, DAAD, Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna, the American Andrew Mellon Foundation, and the International Research Center "Interweaving Performance Cultures" at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Her research concentrates on performativity theories, speculative and decolonial studies, particularly in the context of the history of science. She published twelve single-authored books, the most recent of which are *Nieludzie. Donosy ze sztucznych natur* (*Non-humans. Reports from Nonnatural Natures*, 2015) and, together with Mateusz Borowski, *Sztuczne natury. Performanse technonauki i sztuki* (*Artificial Natures: Performances of Technoscience and Arts*). She co-edited several books in English and German, most recently *Crisis and Communitas: Performative Concepts of Commonality in Arts and Politics* (Routledge 2022). She translates scholarly books and theatre plays from English, German and



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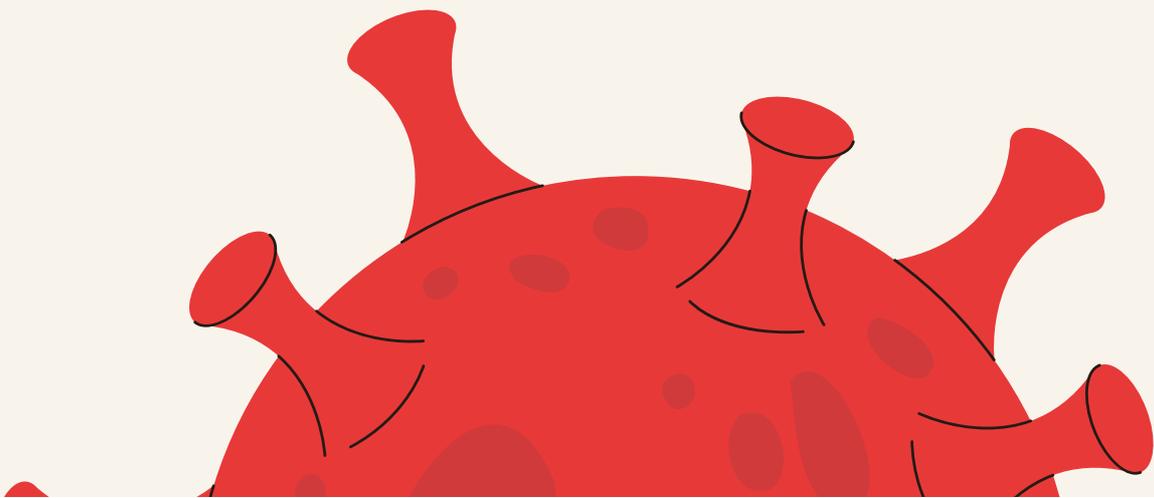
French. She carries out a three-year international research project *Epidemics and Communities in Critical Theories, Artistic Practices and Speculative Fabulations of the Last Decades* funded by the National Science Centre (NCN).



Jonathon TURNBULL (University of Cambridge), Adam SEARLE (Université de Liège)

Rethinking Nature amidst COVID-19: Insurgent Nature, Resurgent Natures, and Anthropause Environmentalisms

In this paper, we take an interest in how the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) has been represented in relation to discourses surrounding Nature. Specifically, we examine how understandings of Nature were reconfigured during COVID-19 lockdowns in three ways, and point to some lockdown lessons to be heeded by conservationists and environmentalists. First, we look at how SARS-CoV-2 was considered a form of insurgent Nature by various online environmental groups, particularly through the use of memes. Here, the virus was a representative of Nature as a whole, a Gaian force biting back, or retaliating, to anthropogenic environmental harm. Second, as a result of this misanthropic insurgence, COVID-19 lockdowns were regularly associated with resurgence. Indeed, stories of nature's resurgence were immensely popular during lockdowns: bellowing birdsong in urban areas, dolphins in Venetian canals, the clearing of polluted skies. Such representations of insurgent and resurgent natures, we argue, stem from an understanding of Nature as something separate from society and humanity. We take issue with these representations in turn, and show how they arise from biocultural decontextualisation that assumes humans are unnatural beings and that Nature has an inherent

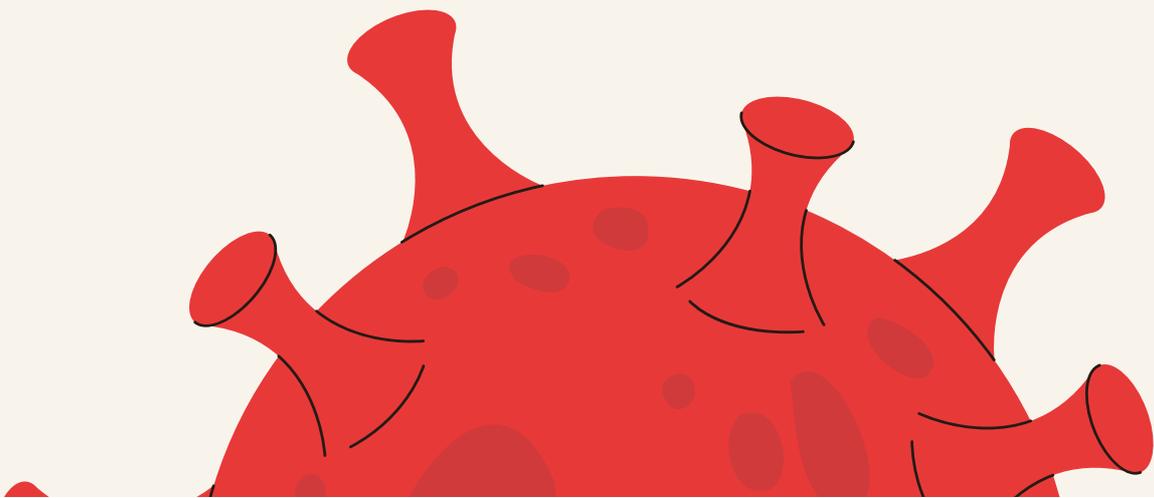


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capacity to resurge. Such fetishisations distract from the need for urgent environmental action and obscure meaningful acts of resurgence, which did indeed occur during COVID-19 lockdowns. Finally, we turn to ‘anthropause environmentalisms’, a concept we generated during our fieldwork, to outline the forms of human–nature engagement that flourished during lockdown. Specifically, anthropause environmentalisms involved: (1) increased attention to ‘scruffy’, local, and urban natures as meaningful encounters (as opposed to an external, spectacular, and wild Nature); (2) a turn to digital natures as a form of meaningful encounter (against the grain of digitisation as distancing humans from Nature); and (3) the emergence of eco-positive digital spaces as tools for community building. Anthropause environmentalisms offer several lessons that conservationists and environmentalists can take through the pandemic portal.

Jonathon Turnbull is a cultural geographer whose current research explores the human–animal relations and weird ecologies of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone, with a focus on dogs and wolves. He works closely with researchers GPS-tracking wolves and an NGO who live-streams dogs being fed in the zone. With Adam, he has ongoing projects investigating the live-streaming of urban peregrine falcons, digitised human–nature relations during quarantine, and digital encounter value

Adam Searle is a cultural and environmental geographer whose research explores the relationships between humans, other animals, and technologies. His interest in digital ecologies stems from recent work concerning the more-than-human geographies of lockdown life, including work on digital human–nonhuman encounters, webcam birdwatching, and online networks of wildlife imagery.



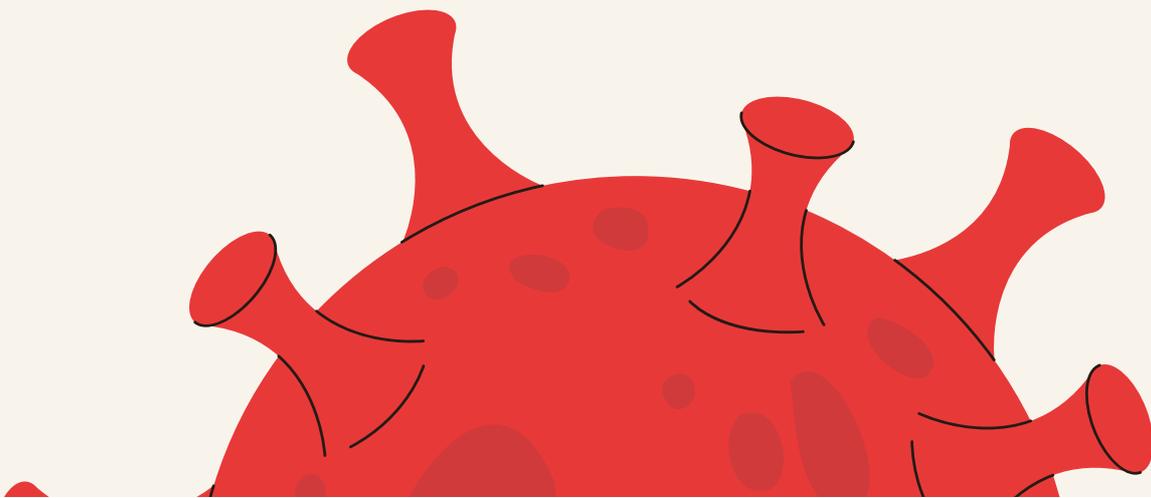
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Karolina ŻYNIIEWICZ (University of Warsaw)

Viral Collaborations – Infectious Relations

The experience of the global COVID-19 pandemic has a substantial impact on all possible spheres of human life (biological and cultural). Coronavirus reminded people that we could not control everything despite technological development. Our existence is collaborative. The life risk related to being infected was a test of the idea proposed by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. She proposed to think about contamination as collaboration. If we saw infection as a form of contamination, maybe it would also be possible to see something positive in the global crisis, a chance for new forms of collaboration. Everything related to protecting humans from being biologically affected by the virus, namely confinement, quarantine, and travel limitation, encouraged people to be more connected virtually. These networks were created virally, incorporating members thanks to the snowball system: one person was adding another one. I managed to be a member of a couple of virtual networks. One of them was a spontaneously created group called: Viral Culture. Bio Art and Society. The group creation was initiated by an academic curator Claire Nettleton, and then it developed virally. Every Saturday, we discussed our experiences related to the pandemic and how the situation influences transdisciplinary practices worldwide. Documentation on the group activity can work as a historical document about how the international art&science community dealt with the global 'contamination' by the virus. I want to share the documentation accompanied by the results of another virtual collaboration, an online residency Biofriction, dedicated to sci-fi storytelling and imagining art production and curating in the future where the corona virus is



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constantly present and harmful to people. My general goal is to show how the risk of infection by the corona virus stimulated creative and collaborative processes and check if Tsing's notion of 'contamination as collaboration' could be applied to the general discourse about the pandemic.

Karolina Żyniewicz is an artist (2009 graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, Department of Visual Arts) and researcher, PhD student (Nature-Culture Transdisciplinary PhD Program at Artes Liberales Faculty, University of Warsaw). Working in a laboratory (mostly at the Institute of Genetics and Biotechnology, Faculty of Biology, University of Warsaw) Żyniewicz locates her works in the field of bio art, although she tries to avoid using this term. She sees her liminal activity as situated knowledge production. She is mostly focused on life in its broad understanding (its biological and cultural meaning). Her projects have mostly conceptual, critical character. The main point of her PhD research is multilevel relations emerging during the realization of liminal projects. She tries to put her observations, as an artist/researcher (liminal being), in the context of Science and Technology Studies (STS) Actor-Network Theory by Bruno Latour and feminist humanities.

