

Air and
Environmental Health
in the (Post-)COVID-19 World

VIRTUAL
CONFERENCE

FROM THE BLACK DEATH TO COVID-19: AIRBORNE DISEASES IN HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND CULTURE

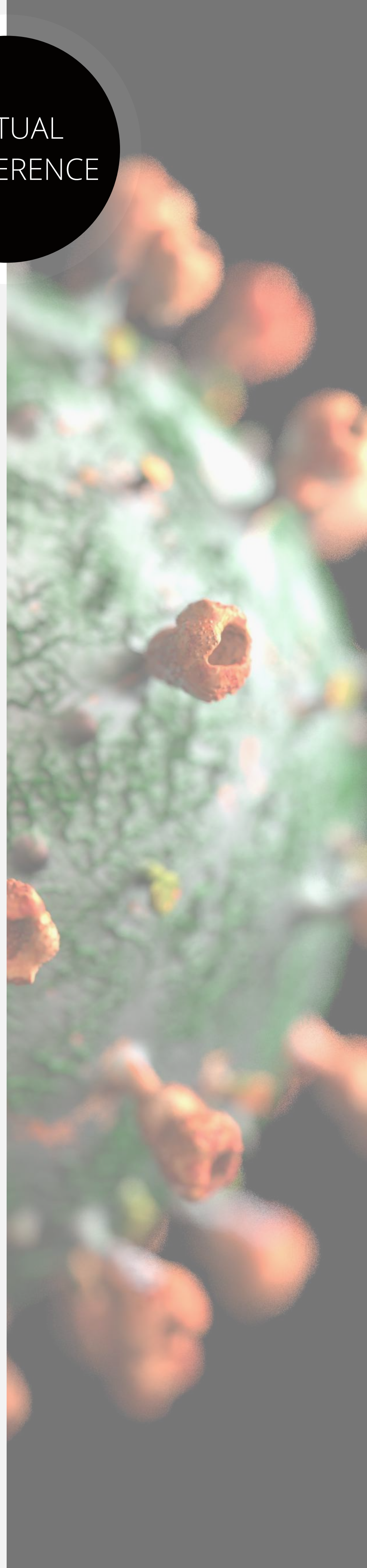
Organized by Tatiana Konrad,
Savannah Schaufler, and Chantelle Mitchell

Keynote Speakers:
Samantha Allen Wright,
Monika Pietrzak-Franger, and Vesta T. Silva

November 16-18, 2022
Virtual Conference via Zoom

More Information:

<https://airproject.univie.ac.at/conferences/from-the-black-death-to-covid-19-airborne-diseases/>



	Wednesday, November 16, 2022
9am (CET)	Opening Remarks Tatiana Konrad, Savannah Schaufler, and Chantelle Mitchell
9:15am - 11:15am (CET)	<div><div>Panel 1</div><div>Chair: Vasundhara Bhojvaid</div><div><u>Sickening Air: Breath, Bodies, and Atmospheres</u></div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• “The Smell of Disease: Masking Sick Air from Plague to COVID-19” Bruno J. Strasser (University of Geneva, Switzerland)• “The Confines of the Sky: Abjection and Milan’s Extramural Territory during the Second Plague Pandemic” Philippa Barr (Macquarie University School of Social Sciences, Australia)• “Exposing Exhales and Inhales: Breathing Air Pollution and the Virus in New Delhi, India” Vasundhara Bhojvaid (Shiv Nadar University, India)• “Miasmas and the Literary Imagination: Ghosts, Air Pollution, and Sanitation in 19th-Century Fiction” Aureo Lustosa Guerios (University of Padua, Italy)</div></div>
	Break
11:30am - 1:00pm (CET)	<div><div>Panel 2</div><div>Chair: Chantelle Mitchell</div><div><u>More-Than-Human Entanglements: Toxicity and Sickness in Environmental Frames</u></div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Re-using a Diseased Landscape for Healthcare in 20th-Century Melbourne, Australia” Rebecca Le Get (Independent Scholar, Australia)• “‘Eco-thrax’: A Speculative Reading of Anthrax as Gaia’s Bioweapon” Chantelle Mitchell (University of Vienna, Austria)• “‘Sealing off’ the Island: Environment, Violence, and Cultural Conflict on the Plague-Hit Island of Poros in 1837” Maria Zarifi (University of Athens, Greece)</div></div>
	Break
3:15pm - 4:15pm (CET)	<div><div>Panel 3</div><div>Chair: Sakti Sekhar Dash</div><div><u>Pandemics and Place: Political, Social, and National (Re)Formations</u></div><div><ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Revisiting Justinian’s Plague: History, Culture, and an Empire” Sakti Sekhar Dash (Open Association of Research Society, USA)• “Pox Novohispana—Colonial Rule and Smallpox in the Viceroyalty of New Spain” Martin Gabriel (University of Klagenfurt, Austria)</div></div>
	Break
5:00pm - 6:30pm (CET)	<div><div>Keynote Talk</div><div>Chair: Chantelle Mitchell</div><div>“An Airborne Fear: Airborne Disease in Literature and Pop Culture” Samantha Allen Wright (William Penn University, USA)</div></div>

	Thursday, November 17, 2022
11:00am - 12:30pm (CET)	<div>Panel 4<div>Chair: Marie Dücker</div><div>Emotion, Affect, and Anxiety</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">“Airborne Contamination and Emotional Responses during the ‘Spotted Fever’ Outbreaks, c. 1904-7” Ian Miller (Ulster University, North Ireland)“Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Relationships and Epidemic in Albert Camus’ <i>La Peste (The Plague)</i>” Angela Ramsoondur (University of Mauritius, Mauritius)“The Visuals of Pan(dem)ic? Pandemics in Comics and Graphic Novels” Marie Dücker (University of Graz, Austria)</div>
	Break
1:30pm - 3:00pm (CET)	<div>Panel 5<div>Chair: Chun-yu Lu</div><div>Masking Up: Protection, Care, and Protest</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">“Masks Can’t Save Lives, Only Bombs Can: Protests and Pandemic in Hong Kong Literature and Popular Culture” Chun-yu Lu (Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan)“Miasmas, Masks, and Vaccine Mandates: Two Centuries of Epidemic Theory and Regulation in Australia” Rebecca Kippen (Monash University, Australia)“Bacteria, Droplets, Epidemics: Laboratory Science and Anti-Infectious Masks (1870s-1910s)” Thomas Schlich (McGill University, Canada)</div>
	Break
3:15pm - 4:15pm (CET)	<div>Panel 6<div>Chair: Bruno J. Strasser</div><div>Socio-Cultural Paradigms of Illness and Recovery</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">“Public Health, Vaccine Acceptability, and COVID-19 in Nigeria” Yemisi Olawale (University of Ilorin, Nigeria) Idris Ridwan Tosho (University of Ilorin, Nigeria)“Colorado as the World’s Sanatorium: Consumption, Convalescence, and Creativity” Tom Keefe (Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design, USA)</div>
	Break
5:00pm - 6:30pm (CET)	<div>Panel 7<div>Chair: Robert Spinelli</div><div>Conspiracy Theories and Vaccine Hesitancy</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">“Contaminate the Vision: Visual Expressions of the Holocaust and COVID-19 Vaccine Opponents” Lior Alperovitch (Bar-Ilan University, Israel)“From Miasma to MMR: A Brief History of Pandemic Call and Response” Robert Spinelli (Cheekwood Estate & Gardens, USA)“Vaccine/Vaccination Hesitancy: Challenging Science and Society” Savannah Schaufler (University of Vienna, Austria)</div>
	Break
6:45pm - 8:15pm (CET)	<div><div>Keynote Talk<div>Chair: Savannah Schaufler</div><div>“Adapting Illness: Visualizing the Invisible” Monika Pietrzak-Franger (University of Vienna, Austria)</div></div></div>

	Friday, November 18, 2022
12:00pm - 1:30pm (CET)	<div>Panel 8<div>Chair: Mine Ömerali Uslu</div><div>Disease and/in (Post-)Apocalyptic Worlds</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">“The Contagious Déjà Vu: Theorizing the Pandemic Existence” Priyanka Das (Presidency University, India)“Airborne Toxicity in Don Delillo’s <i>White Noise</i>” Mine Ömerali Uslu (Ege University, Turkey)“Strange, Awful, Happy: A Serial (Post-)Apocalypse in HBO’s <i>Station Eleven</i> (2021)” Susanne Köller (University of Konstanz, Germany)</div>
	Break
1:45pm - 3:15pm (CET)	<div>Keynote Talk<div>Chair: Tatiana Konrad</div><div>“You can’t fix stupid, you can’t”: The Discourse of Pro-Vaccine Advocates on TikTok in the COVID-19 Pandemic” Vesta T. Silva (Allegheny College, USA)</div></div>
	Break
3:30pm - 5:00pm (CET)	<div>Panel 9<div>Chair: Anna Marta Marini</div><div>Popular Culture and Graphic Representations of Pandemic Outbreaks</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">“The Fantasy of Absolute Fluidity: The Constraints of the Airborne in <i>Severance</i> and <i>Station-11</i>” Jasmine B. Ulmer (Wayne State University, USA)“Tracing the Spread: Film Noir and the Representation of Pandemic Outbreaks” Anna Marta Marini (Universidad de Alcalá, Spain)“Fact or Fiction? Representations of the Black Death in Comics and Comic Art” Michael A. Torregrossa (Independent Scholar, USA)</div>
	Break
5:15pm - 6:45pm (CET)	<div>Panel 10<div>Chair: Bridget Bartlett</div><div>Disproportionate Harms: Inequality, Power, and Health</div><ul style="list-style-type: none">“Bells and Other Airborne Dynamics of Early Modern Commonweal” Bridget Bartlett (University of Mississippi, USA)“Ableism in the Air: Disability Panic in Stephen King’s <i>The Stand</i>” Alexis Young (Georgetown University, USA)“The Intersection of U.S. Black Women’s Mortality, COVID, and Environmental Racism” Tahara Coleman (Texas Woman’s University, USA)</div>
6:45pm - 7:00pm (CET)	<div>Closing Remarks Tatiana Konrad, Savannah Schaufler, and Chantelle Mitchell</div>

“The Smell of Disease: Masking Sick Air from Plague to COVID-19”

Bruno J. Strasser (University of Geneva, Switzerland)

Abstract

This paper revisits historical understandings of the association between air, odors, and diseases by exploring the history of protective masks from the 17th to the 20th centuries. Since antiquity, bad odors have been associated with disease and contagion. Often repulsive smells were thought to be the vectors of contagion and even to be the cause of diseases. But in the 18th century, as Michel Corbin famously argued, the sensibility towards bad odor radically changed. People—at least in France—became increasingly intolerant towards foul smells, which acquired new cultural meanings and associations, especially with regards to poverty and morality. Bourgeois prided themselves in not emitting bodily odors. But looking at the history of protective masks, as a technology to fend-off airborne contagion, offers a different picture. Far from supporting the “disqualification of aromatics” that Corbin identified, the history of masks shows how much the beliefs in the protective power of smell endured.¹ Even the bacteriological revolution, with its odorless microbes, did not displace long held beliefs in practices based on the idea that fighting diseases amounted to fighting bad smells. This paper thus speaks to our complex relationship with our aerial environment and how the modern hierarchy of sensibilities, foregrounding the visible, might have led us to dismiss too rapidly the importance of the olfactory.

Biographical Note

Bruno J. Strasser is a historian of science, technology, and medicine. He is a full professor at the University of Geneva and adjunct professor at Yale University. He has been a visiting fellow at Princeton University, the Max-Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin, and the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris, and a visiting professor at the University of Manchester and Autonomous University of Barcelona. His last book, *Collecting Experiments: Making Big Data Biology* traces the development and use of data collections, especially in the experimental life sciences, from the early-20th century to the present. He is currently working on a global history of the face mask, together with Thomas Schlich (McGill University).

¹ Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988).

“The Confines of the Sky: Abjection and Milan’s Extramural Territory during the Second Plague Pandemic”

Philippa Barr (Macquarie University School of Social Sciences, Australia)

Abstract

In 16th and 17th-century northern Italy a miasmatic understanding of disease causation motivated interventions to transform the atmosphere. If disease spread by air, wrote Girolamo Fracastoro, then the best remedy was escape to better air. However, when cities, homes, and families could not be abandoned, he recommended trying to purify or transform the air instead. Scholars such as Boccalini in “De causis pestilentiae urbem Venetam” or Arellani in “Trattato di peste” suggested interventions such as massive bonfires of scented woods to ‘mutate the air’ and reduce the risk of contagion. In Milan a strict control of particular substances like animal manure, trades like silkworm farming, and bodies perceived to produce a bad atmosphere was ordered by the local health boards. In 1577 one regulation issued by the city health board ordered for the city to be purged, not only of mud and excrement, but also of people who are unclean in their bodies or clothing, who were deemed a source of infection because of the dirt they left behind and their stench. Later that year the health board ordered the gatekeepers of the city to exclude scroungers, beggars, vagabonds, women of ill-repute, and other people who were a threat to the public. Even if they carried plague passports, service workers like porters, rag dealers, shoe repairers, street sweepers and coalmen were barred. This paper argues that ritual expulsion outside the city gates was a form of abjection which constituted the identity of Milan as a center flanked by an extramural territory which eventually developed its own identity as an independent commune. While the two cities, Comune di Corpi Santi and Comune di Milano, did reunify as the Metropolitan City of Milan in the 19th century, this paper argues that a reliance on a strategy of abjection between center and periphery remains influential in contemporary efforts to improve the quality of the air in Milan.

Biographical Note

Philippa Barr has extensive experience working in academic and commercial research in Australia and overseas. Her current research interests include interventions to transform the atmosphere in cities as a result of epidemics or other forms of toxicity such as air pollution events. While she is an anthropologist by trade, she has undertaken research in a number of fields, disciplines and industries. Her first book has been approved to be published by Cambridge University Press in 2022.

**“Exposing Exhales and Inhales:
Breathing Air Pollution and the Virus in New Delhi, India”**
Vasundhara Bhojvaid (Shiv Nadar University, India)

Abstract

Air pollution advocacy in New Delhi is linked to exposure science that quantifies the adverse effects on humans from contact and concentration of materials suspended in air (such as particulate matter) over a period of time, which cross into the porous body through breath. With the COVID-19 lockdown in India exposure was re-interpreted and attention called to breath, given that humans have exposed ourselves to both air pollution and the virus through our own actions. As bodies continue to breathe, different types of exposure management regimes proliferate as while both particulate matter and the virus can be contracted through breath, they transmit differently. This is further complicated in that exposure to the virus or air pollution imbue class distinctions unevenly depending on people's ability to access different types of infrastructure. Relatedly the state's attempt to balance the increasing pressure on the health system and the need to allow people to work and travel for economic sustenance adds to the way in which exposure regimes evolve. In addressing these issues, this paper will ask what types of particularities of bodies unfold thorough the management of exposure to the virus and particulate matter in New Delhi. The re-inscription of bodies will be brought out in how with the fall and increase in air pollution levels in the city due to implementing and lifting the COVID-19 lockdown progressed along with evolving science that made new claims on the means of exposure to the virus.

Biographical Note

Vasundhara Bhojvaid, PhD, is Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, Shiv Nadar University, Delhi-NCR. Her current work looks at how air pollution is affecting and effected by policies, transforming life in urban spaces and understandings of the body. This is informed by her broader interests in how air pollution has close intersections with climate change and is charting new ways in which to anthropologically explore the contemporary. Her work has appeared in *Cultural Anthropology* and *Journal of Material Culture*.

“Miasmas and the Literary Imagination: Ghosts, Air Pollution, and Sanitation in 19th-Century Fiction”

Aureo Lustosa Guerios (University of Padua, Italy)

Abstract

Before the germ theory of disease established itself in the late-19th century, contagious diseases were customarily blamed on the bad smells and foul odors (miasmas). Since disease was understood as being typically communicated through air, the sanitation movements constantly advocated for ventilation: avenues should allow for constant air flux, street should have trees and cities should have parks to purify the air. Individuals should balance the noxious effects of urban pollution by searching for “fresh air” in the mountains or at the coast. Literature and images of the period participate in this cultural understanding and often imagine the not-yet-sanitized city as a foggy swamp infested by miasmas—and one which is depicted by following the topoi of the Gothic genre.

This paper will discuss the representation of miasmas as horrible emanations within a menacing urban scape. The argumentation will follow on three stages. Firstly, it tackles the representation of the urban air environment as ghostly and inherently polluted in images such as Chiffart’s *Cholera in Paris*, 1865—that depicts cholera victims flowing in the Parisian air as in Dante’s *Inferno*—or in literary texts such as Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam* (1818)—in which the plague is unleashed “by a rotting vapor past / from the unburied dead.” Next, the paper reflects on how sanitarians and authors worked together to imagine the ideal healthy city in the treatise *Hygeia, a City of Health* (1876) by the physician Benjamin Richardson which became the basis for Victor Hugo’s utopia in *Les cinq cents millions de la Béguine* (1879). Finally, if the cityscape is reimaged in Europe (now with disease-free air and water), cities in the Tropics continue to be tainted by ghostly vapors in Maupassant’s *Le Horla* (1887)—in which an invisible vampire from Brazil feeds on the French—or in João do Rio’s *A Peste* (1910)—a story of biological horror in which smallpox is spread by putrid tropical winds.

Biographical Note

Aureo Lustosa Guerios obtained his PhD in comparative literature and medical humanities at the University of Padua. His research is entitled *Cholera and the Literary Imagination in Europe, 1830-1930* and focus on the representation of the epidemic outbreaks in 19th and early-20th-century literature. Aureo has also published essays on the artistic imagination of plague and smallpox. He hosts the podcast *Literatura Viral* which is entirely dedicated to the cultural interaction between medicine, history, and art in general.

“Re-using a Diseased Landscape for Healthcare in 20th-Century Melbourne, Australia”

Rebecca Le Get (Independent Scholar, Australia)

Abstract

In 1858, after a long sea voyage, a cow found herself in the Colony of Victoria, Australia. Originally from the United Kingdom, she had been purchased by a farmer at Bundoora, a locality to the north of Melbourne.

This cow became the index case of a deadly, airborne illness that was new to the continent. From this one cow, the disease today known as Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP) spread across Australia and the wider Pacific region—at the time, however, its infectious nature was not universally accepted. Instead CBPP was conceived of as a disease that arose due to the influence of miasma. The farm’s environment was scrutinized for tell-tale signs of disease-causing bad airs, and it was suggested that the locality itself was detrimental to health.

Seventy-five years later, in 1933, a neighboring property opened as a tuberculosis sanatorium. It had been deliberately placed on the rural fringe of the city of Melbourne, and its landscape, climate, and fresh air was praised for its health benefits for people with active tuberculosis infections. This contrasted with the area’s reputation in the previous century, as a place of miasma-caused disease.

Through this coincidence of history, we have multiple descriptions of the post-colonization landscape of this area. With these records, we can see how the perception of this locality changed over time. The focus on how the environment, could be interpreted as contributing positively, or negatively to the health of humans and livestock infected with two respective airborne, epidemic diseases requires further exploration. By comparing the 19th- and 20th-century descriptions of the Bundoora area, it is possible to come to a new understanding of the way that the same landscape can be re-interpreted over time.

Biographical Note

Rebecca Le Get is an independent, early career researcher in the field of environmental history. Her research has primarily focused on the sites that were used as tuberculosis hospitals, particularly charitable and government-operated institutions in the Australian state of Victoria, prior to the adoption of effective antibiotics in mid-20th century. She is particularly interested in how the landscapes surrounding these institutions were frequently incorporated into patient care, in particular the perceived benefits and disadvantages of various topographies, climates, and ecologies, for passive and active patient treatments. She has published in peer reviewed journals about the outdoors as a part of tuberculosis disease treatment in Australia. She has also presented at national and international conferences about the development of the state-run tuberculosis sanatorium system in Victoria, and the broader trends in Australian tuberculosis treatments, during the first half of the 20th century.

**“Eco-thrax”:
A Speculative Reading of Anthrax as Gaia’s Bioweapon”**
Chantelle Mitchell (University of Vienna, Austria)

Abstract

Rising global temperatures as a consequence of anthropogenic activity creates numerous risks for human and more-than-human actants, with disturbances to local and global ecologies presenting a myriad of threats to global safety and wellbeing. As a result of this warming, permafrost in Siberia is melting away to reveal once-frozen carcasses of infected animals—and with them once-dormant spores of the disease-causing pathogen anthrax.

Beyond the biological realities of anthrax are the cultural, political, and historical associations emerging from the early 2000s, where weaponized anthrax was deployed through the U.S. postal service in what is now understood as an act of terror. In reading this incident over a decade later, Phillip Sarasin illuminates the transformation that this event had upon societal apprehensions of anthrax—with the word “anthrax” now metonymically associated with “bioterror” and “weapons of mass destruction.”¹ Drawing together these two threads, the contemporary resurgence of anthrax as an epidemiological threat tied to climate crisis, and the recent historical apprehensions of anthrax as tied to bioterror, it is possible to apprehend a speculative rendering of anthrax as nature’s bioweapon. With news headlines declaring anthrax the pandemic of the future, the threat of anthrax can be read as a bioweapon unleashed by the Earth as a consequence anthropogenic climate crisis.

Recognizing Benjamin Bratton’s epidemiological reading of society, in which the “pandemic is an irruptive revelation of the complex biological reality of the planet with which we are entangled,” the threat of anthrax can be read as a subsequent “revenge of the real.”² Within the scope of this paper, a similarly biopolitical reading is undertaken. This reading is one that recognizes the resurgence of anthrax as tied to climate crisis, imbued as it is with the panic and fear of early-21st-century bioterrorism, toward not only the revenge of the real, but the revenge of Gaia.³

Biographical Note

Chantelle Mitchell is a project assistant at the University of Vienna for the FWF funded project “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World.” Her research interests across the environmental humanities include extraction, temporality, and affect. She has published with *Green Letters*, *e-flux*, *art+Australia*, *Performance Philosophy*, *On_Culture*, and *un Magazine*. She holds a Bachelor in Art History and Philosophy from the University of Western Australia, and a Masters in Curatorship from the University of Melbourne. Chantelle maintains a collaborative practice with Jaxon Waterhouse (Australia), which has seen them present at numerous Australian and international conferences, alongside exhibitions for the University of Melbourne, Edith Cowan University, Sawtooth ARI, and FELTspace, with forthcoming exhibitions across Australia.

¹ Philipp Sarasin, *Anthrax* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), 59.

² Benjamin Bratton, *Revenge of The Real* (London: Verso Books, 2022), 11.

³ James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth is Fighting Back – and How We Can Still Save Humanity* (London: Penguin, 2006)

“Sealing off’ the Island: Environment, Violence, and Cultural Conflict on the Plague-Hit Island of Poros in 1837”

Maria Zarifi (University of Athens, Greece)

Abstract

On the eve of the Greek Orthodox Easter of 1837, a small Greek ship carrying goods was docked on the island of Poros. During the usual quarantine some sailors began to fall ill with symptoms of plague. Soon, the disease spread to the locals, threatening the health security of the mainland. The authorities under the King of Bavarian descent, Otto von Wittelsbach, called upon to respond against a potential health disaster that would challenge the western scientific establishment they represented, as well as their cultural superiority and political legitimacy.

Focusing on three diverse narratives of what happened on Poros, written by three different persons respectively—the German official who took over tackling the epidemic, the Greek doctor who was called to deal with the disease in the field, and a contemporary citizen who experienced the plague on the island—this text will examine the loci the disease drama took place, the violent practices adopted by the authorities, and the impact on the local population. From the port city, up to the island hills, to the isolated coasts, across the mainland swampy seashores, and the inhabited islets that surrounded Poros, this paper will explore how the ecology of those places related to the conceptions of understanding and tackling the first serious epidemic crisis of Modern Greece. In a (theoretically) easily controlled island environment, to what extent those particular dispersed loci of control, prevention or experimentation on plague disease, supported or challenged the prevailing contagionist theory of the time? What were the distinct environmental features that made those places suitable or unsuitable sanitary facilities?

This paper will also refer to the scientific and cultural conflicts that developed between German and Greek scientists and officials in a time that the newly established Modern Greek State tried to find its place in the “civilized” Europe and far from its “contaminated” Ottoman past.

Biographical Note

Maria Zarifi holds a PhD in History and Civilization from the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy. She is an historian of science and was senior lecturer of History and Philosophy of Science at the Hellenic Open University in Greece for 14 years. She has also lectured at the University of Athens, the University of Thessaly in Greece, and the University of Regensburg in Germany as full-time guest professor. She is the author of *Science, Culture and Politics: Germany’s Cultural Policy and Scientific Relations with Greece 1933–1945*. Her latest research interests focus on history of medicine and public health in Greece, mainly the history of infectious diseases and its social and cultural implications. Her current projects deal with the ecologies of diseases, and the historical conceptualization of disease and its materiality.

“Revisiting Justinian’s Plague: History, Culture, and an Empire”

Sakti Sekhar Dash (Open Association of Research Society, USA)

Abstract

The Plague of Justinian, which broke out in 541 AD, devastated the Roman empire and affected large parts of Europe and Asia. It has been documented by the historian Procopius. In his work, *The Secret History*, he records the origin and the devastation wrought by the plague. The effects were widespread and countries as remote as Ireland were affected. But the worst hit was the Byzantine city of Constantinople. Going by the accounts, Justinian’s Plague was the bubonic plague, which triggered the Black Death in Europe during the 14th century. One thing is certain regarding the spread of the bubonic plague. It typically originated at seaports and made ingress to interior regions. Thus, it is apparent that the bubonic plague spread through the sea routes. The plague originated in Asia, most likely in China or east Asia, from where it was transmitted by the Silk Route and ships to Alexandria. The ships docking in the port of Alexandria carried the plague to Byzantium. This paper proposes to study the history and culture of the contemporary times and the manner in which the masses responded to the outbreaks. The growth and progress of the Eastern Roman empire, facilitated trade and commerce with different parts of the world, including Asia and Africa. But the increase in trade also ensured greater movement of people and also resulted in the spread of disease-causing rats. The very system that sustained the nations, empires, and economies, also resulted in the spread of the deadly disease that claimed numerous lives in Europe, Africa, and Asia. In his works, Procopius noted the climate changes occurring during that time. Frost and snow were recorded in Southern Italy during the summer which was unusual. General temperatures dropped below the average, and Europe witnessed a decline in the amount of sunlight. The weather affected the crops, and the harvests were poor, leading to widespread food scarcity. The wars also did not help and added to the misery. The food shortages and social upheavals prompted the people to migrate in large numbers. Along with the migrating people went the rats who spread the disease among the masses. No one was safe from the plague. Even Emperor Justinian contracted the disease; though he survived many others were not so fortunate.

Justinian’s Plague is significant for many reasons. Not only did it claim the lives of millions, but it marked the end of antiquity and ushered in the Middle Ages. A study of Justinian’s Plague provides a grim, but nevertheless interesting account of an outbreak during the antiquity. Through the outbreak, the role of wars and trade in spreading diseases comes under scrutiny; the Byzantine empire was effectively the center of the world—a political, military and economic powerhouse. But the very factors that contributed to its glory also triggered its downfall.

Biographical Note

Sakti Sekhar Dash is a Fellow of Social Science Research Council, Open Association of Research Society, USA. With a keen research interest in myths, legends, and folklore, he has studied and explored the mythology of different cultures. A scholar of modernist writings and green studies, he has written extensively on Greek mythology, Absurd drama, Shakespearean drama, and Deep Ecology.

**“Pox Novohispana—
Colonial Rule and Smallpox in the Viceroyalty of New Spain”**
Martin Gabriel (University of Klagenfurt, Austria)

Abstract

After European conquistadors had reached the coasts of the Americas, a number of infectious diseases hitherto unknown to the Western hemisphere began to spread throughout the “New World.” Influenza epidemics soon devastated the Caribbean islands and smallpox was introduced relatively early as well. During the invasion of the Mexica empire—beginning in 1519—and other areas of what is now Mexico and Central America, disease played a central role in weakening indigenous resistance. In crowded cities like Tenochtitlán, smallpox, transmitted primarily via human vectors through sneezing or coughing, obviously killed thousands of people. Later on, the disease swept through the Spanish Viceroyalty of New Spain in more or less regular intervals. Since an infection with smallpox resulted either in death or lifelong immunity, children, and young adults were always the group hit hardest, thus resulting in lower numbers of births in the following generation. Smallpox was one of the main factors in the decline of indigenous populations in the region between the early sixteenth and early-18th century (combined with other diseases, forced labor, droughts, displacement etc.). In the 18th century, Bourbon Spain was keen on enhancing control also in its colonies—with public hygiene and anti-epidemics policies being one of the fields of interest. Intensified contact between state officials, doctors, clerics, and indigenous groups was seen as one way of realizing a “healthier” and more efficient state. In 1780, administrators in the audiencia of Guatemala fought smallpox by introducing a program of inoculation, and in 1796/97, in the South Mexican region of Oaxaca large-scale quarantines featured as the primary countermeasure against a smallpox outbreak (resulting in widespread protests often led by women and, finally, the lifting of travels bans and the start of an inoculation program).

Biographical Note

Martin Gabriel studied history at the University of Klagenfurt (Austria) and received his PhD in early 2019 with a thesis on irregular warfare during the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since 2012, he has worked as lecturer focusing on modern history (Klagenfurt and Graz), in national and EU projects, and in the sub-department for historical information and documentation at the University of Klagenfurt. His main research interests include the history of modern empires (especially Spain, U.S., Austria-Hungary), colonial violence, colonial societies as well as the history of epidemics or natural resources (e.g., silver, cochineal) in colonial contexts. Publications include, among others, the co-editorship of *Set Phasers to Teach! Star Trek in University and Teaching* (Springer, 2018) and the book chapters “Ambivalent Perceptions. Austria-Hungary, Balkan Muslims, and the ‘Occupation Campaign’ in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1878)” (Berghahn, 2021) and “Grenzräume / Grenzgänge. Zu politischen, sozioökonomischen und imaginierten Ordnungen im frühneuzeitlichen Spanisch-Amerika” (Hermagoras, 2020).

“An Airborne Fear: Airborne Disease in Literature and Pop Culture”

Samantha Allen Wright (William Penn University, USA)

Abstract

In his 1994 nonfiction bestseller *The Hot Zone*, Richard Preston theorized that the Reston strain of the Ebola virus could spread via airborne transmission, potentially leading to a global pandemic unlike any before. Ebola has a fatality rate of anywhere between 25 and 90%, meaning that an airborne strand of Ebola could devastate the human population (for comparison, smallpox had about a 30% rate, the bubonic plague has an up to 60% rate, the 1918 Influenza pandemic only had around a 2.5% fatality rate). Although the Reston strain of ebola does not cause symptoms in humans, and it has not been conclusively proven that the strain can spread by airborne or droplet transmission, Preston’s work has influenced Western perception of Ebola immensely. His work inspired the 1995 hit film *Outbreak* and solidified ebola as a bloody, violent, and most importantly, foreign disease, one that threatens to invade Western countries at any moment. Despite the numerous factual errors in *The Hot Zone*, Preston’s speculation of an airborne form of Ebola seeped into public memory so thoroughly that 20 years later, during the 2014-2016 Western Africa Ebola epidemic, Western media outlets ran story after story addressing this fear. Although the idea of Ebola mutating to an airborne form is exceedingly unlikely, the fear remains. Meanwhile, COVID-19, which is currently a global pandemic and as of May 2021, has killed over 6 million people worldwide, does not seem to inspire the same fear. In fact, when the World Health Organization (WHO) finally described COVID-19 as airborne in late December 2021, the news was met with little fanfare. Why does the *mere idea* of an airborne version of ebola capture the imagination and inspire literature and film, while actual airborne diseases with much higher worldwide case counts and fatalities, such as COVID-19, influenza, or measles do not? Why do people fear the unlikely, while ignoring actual airborne threats?

This paper will examine the history of airborne diseases in literature and film to argue that airborne transmission captures the imagination more than other forms of disease transmission, such as contact with bodily fluids or insects. Airborne transmission has a certain cultural cachet—the idea that a potentially deadly entity (whether viral or otherwise) could enter your body through something as unavoidable as breathing has terrified generations of people and inspired a great number of works exploring this fear. However, despite the fear of airborne transmission, most fictional depictions of airborne illness are not particularly realistic. More pointedly, actual airborne diseases do not inspire fear or caution the way one would expect, given the breadth of literature and film on airborne contagion.

Examining this apparent contradiction, this paper argues that through the medical humanities, medical professionals, and public health officials can better understand the impact literature and film about airborne disease has on the public’s perception of airborne illness and therefore communicate more effectively and efficiently about the real threats posed by airborne contagion.

Biographical Note

Sam Allen Wright is the Department Chair of the Humanities and Assistant Professor of English at William Penn University in Oskaloosa, Iowa, USA. Her research focuses on the medical humanities, disability studies, and life writing. She is primarily interested in writings about epidemics, such as memoir, fiction, and journalism, and how these writings impact cultural understandings of issues of contagion, stigma, and access to healthcare. Her first book, *American Life Writing and the Medical Humanities: Writing Contagion*, examines the medical humanities and disability studies and their connections. She is currently working on a book project tentatively titled *Media Literacy and Epidemics* which focuses on science writing in the media and science literacy.

“Airborne Contamination and Emotional Responses during the ‘Spotted Fever’ Outbreaks, c. 1904-7”

Ian Miller (Ulster University, North Ireland)

Abstract

Around the turn of the 20th century, a mysterious disease known as the “spotted fever” reached epidemic proportions in Belfast, Glasgow, and New York. Known clinically as cerebrospinal meningitis, spotted fever had horrific, monstrous symptoms including paralysis, blindness, deafness, agonizing bodily pains. Should the symptoms and signs of bodily contamination appear, spotted fever usually culminated either in a long, protracted coma or a sudden, unexpected, and agonizing death.

In scholarly literature, the fear and panic prompted by outbreaks of spotted fever have been largely overshadowed by more far-reaching and traumatic incidences of airborne contamination (e.g., the 1918-19 influenza pandemic). This paper highlights the sheer fear produced by outbreaks of meningitis, locally, nationally, and globally during the first decade of the 20th century. Analysis will reveal much about the changing capacities of physicians, bacteriologists and public health authorities in understanding and mitigating the impact of contagion at a time of uncertainty about precisely how meningitis spread.

More specifically, this paper explores the narrative form of national and regional journalism to better understand how public audiences “got to know” the virus. Journalists helped to humanize the concept of virus by exploring the airways pathways by which it seemed to travel and its asymptomatic presence in the seemingly healthy. Unlike clinical literature, journalists reported the heart-wrenching human cost of contagion and the devastating familial impacts of spotted fever in contaminated households. They also developed more comforting narratives of bacteriological investigation and attempts to purify infected human bodies through lumbar puncture procedures and serum development. This was accompanied by efforts to improve housing, access to fresh air and environmental conditions that impacted upon air quality. It also explores how this overlooked epidemic provoked new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving towards airborne contagion.

Biographical Note

Ian Miller is Lecturer in Medical History at Ulster University. He is the author of six books on topics including force-feeding, the changing Irish diet, and the surprisingly interesting history of the Victorian stomach. He is Book Review Editor for *Social History of Medicine*. Ian is PI on the Epidemic Belfast Project which, so far, includes a 25 episode podcast on Belfast’s medical history at epidemic-belfast.com. In November 2022, he will be Visiting Research Fellow at HEX (Academy of Finland Centre of Excellence in the History of Experiences), Tampere University.

“Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Relationships and Epidemic in Albert Camus’ *La Peste* (*The Plague*)”

Angela Ramsoondur (University of Mauritius, Mauritius)

Abstract

Relationships are what sustain and give an edge to the definition of the people in face of chaos. Albert Camus’ *La Peste* (*The Plague*) demonstrates some distance is formed with some people in the novel as the isolation of the city of Oran brings separation for the characters Dr. Rieux and Rambert. Camus portrays his characters trapped within the city as a sense of void develops throughout time. One way to revolt against this tragedy of the plague is through solidarity and action. A world without meaning (because of the plague) starts getting a definition when some of the characters do not rest and fight/rebel in their own way. Camus’ novel acutely investigates human relations in the background while the epidemic breaks veils that were put in the eyes of the characters. Time becomes a key player in times of epidemic and/or pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that relationships matter but with habit and time, we have distanced ourselves from people who have always been less important to us. Camus shows that in the novel the epidemic in Oran brings a change in the sense of time and memory. People distanced themselves from those they see less and thus think less. What is nearer in proximity, the stress of the plague, and those involved in the fight are more important and urgent than those in the memory. This paper illustrates the intricacies of relationships and memory but also with the idea of inner rebellion that Camus advocates in his philosophy.

Biographical Note

Angela Ramsoondur is member of the Department of English Studies at the University of Mauritius. Her research areas are American Studies, Ecocriticism, Island Studies, and Diaspora Studies. She presented papers as well in connection with popular culture, literature, and teaching and learning in higher education at different conferences. She has recently published with *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* (Vol. 34, 2021). Her recent virtual presentation was at Alabama State University, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Research & Creative Activity International Hybrid Symposium, entitled “Time, Isolation, and Self-Reflection in Albert Camus’s *La Peste* and *L’Etranger*.”

“The Visuals of Pan(dem)ic? Pandemics in Comics and Graphic Novels”

Marie Dücker (University of Graz, Austria)

Abstract

In the wake of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, a vast number of comics and graphic novels have been published, of which a large majority is considered educational sequential art and has emerged from the relatively new and interdisciplinary field of graphic medicine. Social media, television, and newspapers offered examples of COVID-comics, intending to be both educational as well as entertaining. Other examples of sequential art addressing pandemics suggest postapocalyptic scenarios, utilizing the popular zombie trope to offer roadmaps on how to react to outbreaks of pandemics, as is for example the case in the 193-issue comic *The Walking Dead*, written by Robert Kirkman and illustrated by Tony Moore and others and published between 2003 and 2019, *Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic*, written by Maggie Silver and published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2012. *Science Comics: Plagues* by Falyann Christine Koch, published in 2017, on the other hand offers a realistic rendition of actual research and intricate science while being targeted at a young implied readership that is likely unable to fully grasp the highly complex information discussed in the text.

What these texts have in common, however, is how they discuss airborne contagion in relation to the emotion of panic. This paper is focused on the visualization contagion can take on and propose close readings of a select body of primary texts. This presentation looks at how the comic format and the genre of the graphic novel succeed or fail in communicating the severity of contagion. In doing so, this paper will address the limitations of the genre and ask to which degree sequential art can and should be considered an apt medium to educate and raise awareness about pandemics, using and—in some cases—overusing the emotionally charged field the emotion of panic establishes within the human mind.

Biographical Note

Marie Dücker is Assistant Professor of American Studies at the Department of American Studies at the University of Graz where she also teaches American literary and cultural studies. Her research interests are in intermediality studies, cognitive literary studies, affect studies, and feminist literary criticism. She holds a PhD from the University of Graz and her dissertation, “Affect and Emotion in the Intermedial Interfaces of the Contemporary American Young Adult Suicide Novel,” was awarded the Fulbright Prize of American Studies in 2019. Her doctoral research was supported by two research grants from the University of Graz. Prior to starting her postdoctoral engagement, she worked as a Teaching Associate at Williams College, Massachusetts. She is a member of the EAAS’s Women’s Network Steering Committee and is co-editor of the Women’s Network journal WiN. She has published in the fields of American literature, affect studies, and intermediality studies and is currently researching on the climate change graphic novel.

“Masks Can’t Save Lives, Only Bombs Can: Protests and Pandemic in Hong Kong Literature and Popular Culture”

Chun-yu Lu (Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan)

Abstract

The years 2019 and 2020 marked an unprecedented time in Hong Kong history. The Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong, while enjoyed civil liberties and juridical independence, now had every aspect of life under threat when Hong Kong government intended to introduce a new extradition law that might subject Hong Kong citizens to Chinese law. Large-scale protests broke out in the city since June 2019 and well into 2020, only to be curbed by yet another crisis—the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the protests against the extradition law, Hong Kong protesters would wear gas masks to shield from the tear gas—an airborne toxicant—fired by Hong Kong police. Masks later became ubiquitous in the city when everyone—not just the protesters—was anxious to protect themselves from coronavirus since early 2020. Masks, thus, became an irrefutable symbol of crisis in contemporary Hong Kong. Orchestra members played violins with gas masks covering their youthful faces in the music video of “Glory to Hong Kong,” the anthem of the 2019 protests, while numerous poems and stories depict the anxiety and romance with the presence of face masks during the protests, the pandemic, or both. This paper suggests that masks are used as aesthetic strategies and technologies to bring to surface of the unconscious feelings, idea, and ideology, and to uncover the effects of paranoia, resistance and disillusionment when political crisis and pandemic interlaced in contemporary Hong Kong. One poet thus proclaims, “Masks can’t save lives, only bombs can.”

Biographical Note

Chun-yu Lu received her PhD of Chinese and Comparative Literature from Washington University in St. Louis. She taught at Hobart and William Smith Colleges and The College of William and Mary in USA before joining Chung Yuan Christian University in Taiwan. Her research interests include literary modernity, gender studies, popular culture, postcolonial studies, emotion and affect theory. She is working on her book projects, *Make Love and War: Chinese Popular Romance in Greater East Asia, 1937-1945* as well as *Masking Up: Dystopian Affects in Sinophone Cultures*.

“Miasmas, Masks, and Vaccine Mandates: Two Centuries of Epidemic Theory and Regulation in Australia”

Rebecca Kippen (Monash University, Australia)

Abstract

“Unprecedented” is a word that is often used to describe measures put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Australia, and in other countries. In fact, Australia has a long history of epidemic regulations, starting with the quarantine of ships in 1804 to prevent the introduction of yellow fever from New York.

Restrictions in Australia included shutting national, state, and local borders; mask mandates; personal protective equipment; quarantine centers; temporary closure of schools and other places of gathering; social distancing; and compulsory vaccination. Until the widespread acceptance of germ theory in the late 19th century, the miasmatic theory of disease was king. Although the notion that “bad air” caused disease was incorrect, it did result in effective measures against infection, such as sanitation and ventilation. Opening windows and gathering outside was recommended 200 years ago, as it is during the current pandemic.

Supported by contemporary photographs, newspaper reports, and medical articles, this presentation describes epidemic restrictions introduced in Australia for bubonic plague, smallpox, Spanish influenza, and polio and how these were framed in terms of medical knowledge of the time; the history of vaccine mandates; and previous epidemic conspiracy theories, and quack remedies that are strikingly similar to those around during the current pandemic (internal disinfectant, anyone?).

Biographical Note

Rebecca Kippen, PhD, is an Australian historical demographer with more than 20 years' experience in researching historical epidemics and pandemics. Her PhD, awarded by the Australian National University, was titled “Death in Tasmania: using civil death registers to measure 19th-century cause-specific mortality.” Rebecca Kippen has published on historical mortality and cause-of-death classifications, scarlet fever and measles epidemics, and the Spanish Influenza and COVID-19 pandemics. She previously held a nationally competitive 4-year fellowship at the University of Melbourne on “Epidemics, mortality and longevity.” She is currently Associate Professor of Demography at Monash University and leads the Australian Research Council Linkage Project “Putting death in its place: mortality, intergenerational disadvantage, and the built environment.” She teaches demographic methods and research methods.

“Bacteria, Droplets, Epidemics: Laboratory Science and Anti-Infectious Masks (1870s-1910s)”

Thomas Schlich (McGill University, Canada)

Abstract

By the time of World War I, the anti-infectious mask had its place as part of the equipment of medical attendants in epidemics of airborne diseases. The use of masks was based on scientific evidence, it was thought. But what counted as evidence? How was that evidence produced? How did it convince the medical world of the benefits of mask wearing? Before the 1870s there was not even general agreement about the causation of many epidemic diseases, let alone the possible role of masks in preventing their spread. This contribution looks at the means and strategies that made the medical world accept germ theory, conceptualize air as a medium of transmission, and use masks as a protection against infection. It starts with the laboratory methods that allowed Robert Koch and other bacteriologists to make the case for specific causality, follows their development for exploring the spread of infectious diseases through droplets in the air and its prevention by masks in hospitals and tuberculosis sanatoria. It ends with the widespread application of masking in the Manchurian Plague epidemic of 1910/11 where laboratory methods were used to convince local authorities as well as caregivers to wear masks for their own protection. This contribution traces the nature and the role of scientific evidence in the uptake of the idea that germs can spread through the air and that it makes sense to wear a mask to prevent this airborne form of disease transmission from happening.

Biographical Note

Thomas Schlich, MD, is James McGill Professor in the History of Medicine at McGill University in Montreal, and Chair of the Department Social Studies of Medicine. Trained as a physician, his research interests are the history of modern medicine, science, and technology (18th-21st centuries). He held previous research and teaching positions in Cambridge, England, and in Stuttgart and Freiburg, Germany. He has published books on, among other things, the origins of organ transplantation, 1880s-1930s, and the history of operative treatment of broken bones, 1960s-1990s. and has recently edited the *Palgrave Handbook of the History of Surgery* (2018). Currently he is working on a book about the history of modern surgery, 1800-1914, and, with Bruno Strasser, Geneva, another book on the history of the medical mask. Their paper “Making the medical mask: surgery, bacteriology, and the control of infection (1870s-1920s)” will be published in the 2022 spring issue of the journal *Medical History*.

“Public Health, Vaccine Acceptability, and COVID-19 in Nigeria”

Yemisi Olawale (University of Ilorin, Nigeria)

Idris Ridwan Tosho (University of Ilorin, Nigeria)

Abstract

Vaccination has been one of the most significant advances in public health, particularly across the 20th and 21st centuries. In recent years, the outbreak of diseases such as the rota virus, tuberculosis, malaria and particularly the coronavirus (COVID-19) has resulted in rapid development and increased use of vaccines. In the midst of COVID-19, the rates of transmission and widespread fatalities saw global efforts directed towards the development of vaccines. However, since the development of the COVID-19 vaccine, the rate of immunization (acceptability) and hesitancy (rejection) has constituted a major debate. Despite the importance of vaccination in tackling the spread of the virus, the vaccine acceptance rate has been very low in Nigeria. Out of a population of 206 million, the World Health Organization (WHO) record as of April 7, 2022, shows that 33,932,163 have been vaccinated representing 16.7% of the population. The problem of vaccine refusal in Nigeria has been attributed to several factors triggered by religious beliefs, medical reasons (perception of vaccine medical components and safety, internet (incorrect information) among others. This study seeks to enhance understanding of the current state of vaccine research from the perspective of vaccine hesitancy by drawing attention to the current challenges militating against COVID-19 vaccine acceptability among Nigerians. This study relies on secondary source of data which includes books, journals, and newspaper articles.

Biographical Notes

Yemisi Olawale is currently a Graduate Student in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in History and International Studies from Osun State University, Oshogbo. He has also served as a Graduate Assistant in the Department of History, Niger State College of Education, Minna (2018-2019). His recent publication includes Yemisi O.I., “Engaging Migration-LED-Development Strategies in Africa: Some Aspects of Africa (under)-Development in Migration Since 1980,” *West Africa and the Europeans since the 15th Century: Essays in Honour of Patience Okwuchi Erim* (Glienieke, Galda Verlag, 2021), Yemisi O.I., “Gender Imbalance and Girl Child Education in Niger State, North Central Nigeria,” *Africa: Discourses, Practices and Policies* (Lanham: Rowman Publishers, 2021). He is currently conducting an ethnographical study on Ogbomoso deported immigrant from Ghana under the Alien Compliance Order of 1969.

Idris Ridwan Tosho is an alumnus of University of Ilorin, Ilorin Nigeria, is currently a Graduate student in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria. His areas of academic interest but are not limited to international relation, social and medical history. He is currently researching on Colonialism and Sanitation in Ilorin. His recent publication is Yemisi O.I., Idris, R.T., “Nigeria Youth, Migration Narratives and Social Media: A Perspective,” *Electronic Journal of Social and Strategic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2021).

**“Colorado as the World’s Sanatorium:
Consumption, Convalescence, and Creativity”**
Tom Keefe (Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design, USA)

Abstract

The city of Denver is known as an “Instant City” and grew quickly first because of Colorado Gold Rush, then as the “World’s Sanatorium.”¹ In the late 1800s, the tuberculosis pandemic, also known as the White Plague (Boyd, 1907), was the leading cause of death in the United States. Infected people from across the United States and from around the world came to Colorado because of the dry air and abundant sunshine for heliotherapy.²

In 1904, a group of Eastern European Jewish immigrants led by Dr. Charles Spivak established the Jewish Consumptives’ Relief Society (JCRS) as a non-sectarian tuberculosis hospital with a kosher kitchen to serve the observant Jewish community as well. According to Jeannie Abrams, “By 1925, as much as 60% of Colorado’s population had migrated to the state, either directly or indirectly, for treatment of tuberculosis.”³ Denver became an instant city as a result of its “protracted growth from wilderness to city into the span of a generation” and dramatically altered the environment of Colorado.⁴ To better understand how the tuberculosis pandemic affected the lived contexts and socioeconomic environment of Denver, the presentation will incorporate the history of the tuberculosis pandemic, the history of Denver and the Jewish Consumptives’ Relief Society, trapped life, and the use of the environment in convalescence. The presentation will include references to JCRS leaders Dr. Charles Spivak and Dr. Philip Hilkowitz as well as the rich history of Yiddish poetry that emerged from the JCRS patients including work by Yehoash, Lune Mattes, H. Leivick, and others.⁵ While tuberculosis is included in Coloradan history, the significance of Colorado as the “World’s Sanatorium” is less documented in the field of literature. The proposal may benefit the field of research by expanding the understanding regarding Colorado’s role in the tuberculosis pandemic in the later 19th and early 20th centuries.

Biographical Note

Tom Keefe is an Associate Professor of Humanities at the Rocky Mountain College of Art + Design. The college sits on the campus of the historic Jewish Consumptives’ Relief Society. He holds an EdD in Organizational Leadership as well as an MA in International Relations and a MAT in Social Studies Education. Tom’s current research is on pedagogy and leadership, genocide education, and identity construction. His recent publications include “Race, Identity, and Choice: Black Voices on Liberia and the American Colonization Society” in *The African American Experience: From Slavery to Liberation* (2022), and “Using Art to Trigger Memory, Intergenerational Learning, and Community” in the *International Journal of Lifelong Learning in Art Education* (2019). He is also the recipient of the Philip J. Steele Distinguished Faculty Award.

¹ J. Abrams, “Chasing the Cure,” University Libraries Online Exhibits, University of Denver, n.d., accessed May 10, 2022, <https://exhibits.library.du.edu/librariespresents/exhibits/show/chasing-the-cure/chasing-the-cure/the-world-s-sanatorium>; Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver (Urban Life in America)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Erin Blakemore, “The Disease that Helped Put Colorado on the Map,” *History*, October 4, 2017, <https://www.history.com/news/the-disease-that-helped-put-colorado-on-the-map>.

² Louie Croft Boyd, “The Tuberculosis Situation in Denver, Colorado,” *The American Journal of Nursing* 7, no. 4 (1907): 265-268.

³ J. Abrams, “Chasing the Cure,” University Libraries Online Exhibits, University of Denver, n.d., accessed May 10, 2022, <https://exhibits.library.du.edu/librariespresents/exhibits/show/chasing-the-cure/chasing-the-cure/the-world-s-sanatorium>.

⁴ Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver (Urban Life in America)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

⁵ Ernest B. Gilman, *Yiddish Poetry and the Tuberculosis Sanatorium: 1900-1970* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014).

“Contaminate the Vision: Visual Expressions of the Holocaust and COVID-19 Vaccine Opponents”

Lior Alperovitch (Bar-Ilan University, Israel)

Abstract

The public debate in the context of vaccines to the coronavirus naturally aroused strong feelings. The fear and uncertainty about a vaccine shrouded in bureaucratic fog along with the aggressive legislation initiated by governments against its opponents, fueled conspiracy theories about the hidden motivations behind the urgency with which things were done.

All of these created fertile ground for a discourse of extremes into which it was predictably also appropriated the Holocaust, as an unrepresented manifestation of a crime against humanity committed by dictatorial conduct. Hence the short way to use a variety of symbols related to the history of the Holocaust. When the message is clear, the legislation is an up-to-date expression of violent politics that seeks to eliminate any kind of criticism, politics that does not resort to the means of persecution that a state, as a violent authority can exercise. On the other hand, opponents of vaccines feel under persecution for their right to hold their skeptical worldview towards vaccines.

This paper addresses the visual expressions, which originate in the history of the Holocaust, which were used by the opponents of the vaccines. Thus, asking for visual expressions that borrow objects that have been used to exclude Jews and implement antisemitic policies has become symbols that express political persecution in the context of conducting public medical policy. This is in the context of the place of doctors and medical discourse in the process of extermination of the Jewish people carried out by the Nazi authorities.

Biographical Note

Lior Alperovitch, PhD, is a lecturer on the 20th-century history of Europe and the Jewish people, who specializes in the history of the Holocaust and its commemoration in Israel, visual representation of the Holocaust, and halakhic rulings and religious observance during the Holocaust. He completed the bulk of his academic studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in the departments of history, Jewish history, Jewish thought, and international relations. He holds two master's degrees—one in history and the other in Jewish thought—and a doctorate in history. Lior Alperovitch is the head of the Center for the Study of Holocaust Visualization at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem, he is a Spiegel Fellow at the Finkler Institute for Holocaust Research at Bar-Ilan University and teaches in the department of visual and material culture at Bezalel.

“From Miasma to MMR: A Brief History of Pandemic Call and Response”

Robert Spinelli (Fisk University, USA)

Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, ideas such as social distancing, isolation, and wearing masks to contain the potential spread of contagion became common parts of our everyday vocabulary. To many people, these were foreign concepts that seemed unprecedented and uncomfortable. Those who were opposed to public health measures cried foul, insisting that these efforts were an affront to personal liberties and went beyond historical preventative measures taken in the past. The status of COVID-19 as a worldwide event has instigated a massive shift in the areas of public health, politics, and many other interrelated avenues of life. It is important to note, however, that the ways in which large scale disease outbreaks have always maintained similarities and that the COVID-19 pandemic also can be understood within the same means.

This paper will seek to place COVID-19 into a proper historical context through examination of the cultural, scientific, and religious ramifications of two other public health events: The Black Death and the AIDS epidemic. Both events were rapid, catastrophic health crises that reflected the social stigmas, beliefs, and biases of their time. In particular, this paper will discuss the role that antisemitic biases and conspiracy theories have played during these disparate health crises. Examining how societies reacted to these past diseases will allow to illustrate how COVID-19 is unique but also how its cultural impact reflects past incidences of disease/death and foreshadows how future events may be handled.

Biographical Note

Robert Spinelli is the Special Collections Librarian at Fisk University. Prior to his time at Fisk, he received an MA in Philosophy from Brock University and an MS in Information Sciences from the University of Tennessee Knoxville. Robert Spinelli enjoys working with the historical materials at Fisk University and assisting professors and students with their research. His primary research interests include conspiracy theories, digital humanities, death traditions and the library of the mind. In his spare time, he enjoys cooking, hiking, and spending time with his family.

“Vaccine/Vaccination Hesitancy: Challenging Science and Society”

Savannah Schaufler (University of Vienna, Austria)

Abstract

The way disasters (e.g., disease, war, and natural disasters) affect people is reflected in their behavior: in the face of a disaster, people are likely to act out of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, and panic in terms of self-preservation.¹ Panic buying or irrational stockpiling, for example, are expressions of increasing loss of control leading to the purchase of unusual quantities of products to sustain oneself in times of crisis or disruption in supply chains.² Following more than two years of living amidst a global pandemic, issues of human behavior, and especially individual and societal resilience in response to disasters, are increasingly gaining focus. The Theory of Planned Behavior formulated by Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein in 1985 and the Cognitive Dissonance Theory established by Leon Festinger in 1957 can help explain behavioral changes and the underlying intrinsic conflicts and behavioral intentions during exceptional times.

In historical research on previous pandemics, social division is a recurring issue. Especially in relation to global health, such phenomena as prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, interpersonal hatred, and hostility are identified as having a negative impact on enforcements to contain infectious disease.³ In this context, the question arises of how to encourage members of global society to behave cohesively in terms of quarantine, social distancing, and vaccination. Using a combination of behavioral studies on topics such as post-disaster research, consumerism, and altruism, as well as newspaper articles and popular media reports, this paper demonstrates the existence of disbelief, misrepresentations, and twisted truths regarding scientific knowledge in the context of vaccine fatigue and skepticism.

While vaccinations have helped improve public health and resulted in declines in mortality and morbidity from various infectious diseases (the eradication of smallpox and polio, reduction of measles, mumps, rubella, and diphtheria, for example), skepticism and resistance toward their efficacy are increasing.⁴ Looking specifically to the relatively new vaccines inoculating against the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), this paper explores factors contributing to vaccine skepticism, especially with regard to Western Europe and the U.S. while identifying strategies for mitigating this problem.

Biographical Note

Savannah Schaufler is a project assistant at the University of Vienna for the FWF funded project “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World.” During her studies at the University of Vienna, where she graduated with honors in Evolutionary Anthropology, she participated in several inter- and transdisciplinary projects at the intersection of cultural, human, and biological sciences. In addition, she is finishing her bachelor’s degree in Cultural and Social Anthropology and has already published in peer-reviewed literature. She is also a trained paramedic and has worked as a medical assistant for several years.

¹ Kum Fai Yuen et al., “The Psychological Causes of Panic Buying Following a Health Crisis,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 10 (May 18, 2020): 1–14.

² Catherine Prentice, Sara Quach, and Park Thaichon, “Antecedents and Consequences of Panic Buying: The Case of COVID-19,” *International Journal of Consumer Studies* 46, no. 1 (January 2022): 132–46.

³ Allan M. Brandt, “Pandemics and Public Health History,” *American Journal of Public Health* 111, no. 3 (March 2021): 409–10; Michael A. Peters, “Love and Social Distancing in the Time of Covid-19: The Philosophy and Literature of Pandemics,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53, no. 8 (July 3, 2021): 755–59.

⁴ Eve Dubé et al., “Vaccine Hesitancy: An Overview,” *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics* 9, no. 8 (August 8, 2013): 1763–73; Anja Bauer, Daniel Tiefengraber, and Ursula Wiedermann, “Towards Understanding Vaccine Hesitancy and Vaccination Refusal in Austria,” *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift* 133, no. 13–14 (July 2021): 703–13.

“Adapting Illness: Visualizing the Invisible”

Monika Pietrzak-Franger (University of Vienna, Austria)

Abstract

The recent pandemic has once again emphasized the role of media (technologies) in the construction of and communication of knowledge about infectious diseases. Recently, the concept of the “infodemic” emerged to mark the speed and the volume of (mis- and dis-) information often leading to confusion and “risk-taking behaviors that can harm health” (WHO). At the same time, comparatively little has been said about the concomitant “visiodemic” as well as about the use of particular (digital) technologies in the processes of knowledge construction and communication.¹

This talk offers an overview of the variety of knowledge construction and communication practices characteristic of the COVID-19 pandemic and maps these out against the contemporary media landscape. Taking into consideration the historicity of these practices and the centrality that visualization plays in them (especially in the context of syphilis), it draws attention to the set of possibilities that particular media platforms afford as well as their limitations when it comes to the construction and communication of (experiential) knowledge. It, then, draws attention to the ways in which COVID-19 has had to be adapted to particular media and asks about the effects of this adaptation. Taking all these adaptation strategies into consideration, this paper argues not for a visual but rather for media and digital turns in Medical and Health humanities.

Biographical Note

Monika Pietrzak-Franger is Professor of British Cultural and Literary Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria. Her areas of research range from adaptation and transmediality to (neo-)Victorian studies and Medical Humanities. Her publications include, as author, *Syphilis in Victorian Literature* (2017), as editor, *Women, Beauty and Fashion* (2014), and as co-editor, *Special Issues: Transforming Medical Humanities* (forth. 2023), *Disease, Communication and the Ethics of Invisibility* (2014) and *Neo-Victorian Globalisation* (2015) as well as *Nineteenth-Century Transmedia Practices* (2022), *Reflecting on Darwin* (2014), *Handbook of the English Novel, 1931-1900* (2020) and *Literature and Medicine* (forth. 2023). Currently, she co-leads an interuniversity cluster on *Post-Covid-19 Care* and works on *visiodemics* and viral theater.

¹ Monika Pietrzak-Franger, “A ‘Visiodemic’: COVID-19, Contagion Media, and the British Press,” *Anglistik* 32, no. 3 (2021): 183-203. <https://doi.org/10.33675/ANGL/2021/3/15>.

“The Contagious Déjà Vu: Theorizing the Pandemic Existence” Priyanka Das (Presidency University, India)

Abstract

Pandemic is the harbinger of an apocalyptic and dystopian world, or at least that is how it has primarily been presented. Abandoned homes, fallen hospitals, defunct armies, mass graves—most of the cinematic representations depict an irrecoverable dark world. It would often begin with an unclassified virus and may catapult into zombie apocalypse. Although we have relegated the doomsday to the periphery for now, the COVID-19 pandemic has definitely blurred the line between reality and fantasy. Theologically believed to be a symbolic Armageddon on one hand, and scientifically speculated as a cataclysmic biopolitical weapon on the other, the coronavirus has rejected a definitive categorization and has pushed the limits of science by destabilizing the existing theories.

This paper intends to theorize two texts—one literary, another visual—to understand the latest airborne coronavirus pandemic. The first text is Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* that captures the pragmatic challenges of a quarantine existence during the terrible Black Death. While Boccaccio upholds the collective, the COVID-19 pandemic with its social distancing motto has only furthered individualism. The second text is the American television series *Salem* which has a ravaging plague at its heart and bears uncanny resemblance to contemporary scenario in terms of witch-hunt, landscape, and temporal entities, both in their literal and metaphorical sense, that encompasses the narrative of the pandemic.

While COVID-19 has ensured spatial defamiliarization and temporal distortion, both humanities and technology have produced new symbols to construct an invisible society, thereby redefining the concept of human health as well as altering experiential sequence of human existence. This paper aims to read the Black Death and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as ‘events’ that challenge the universally centered notions of time, space, and civilization and situates us in a Derridean free play.

Biographical Note

Priyanka Das is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Presidency University, India. Her MPhil is on the objectification of male body in Bollywood films and advertisements, and her PhD is on *Game of Thrones*. She specializes in Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Popular Culture (television series, memes, and videogames). She has published on American and Asian films and television dramas in international peer-reviewed journals. She is currently working on India’s neo-fascism in digital spaces, and genocides in Asian dramas. Her forthcoming publication from Routledge is a co-edited volume *Holocaust and Popular Culture*.

“Airborne Toxicity in Don Delillo’s *White Noise*”

Mine Ömerali Uslu (Ege University, Turkey)

Abstract

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, people across the world came to realize the significant relationship between air and human health. This pandemic, which changed the course of many lives, demonstrated how air serves as a transmitter of viruses. However, this quality of air is not new, with air acting as a significant tool in transmitting diseases, pollution, and even death. It is crucial to understand that airborne diseases include but are not limited to epidemics or pandemics such as the black death, influenza, or COVID-19. Since the Chernobyl disaster, it is perceived that “the divine and demonic shadow kingdom ‘of antiquity’ has been superseded by the modern shadow kingdom of toxic and radiological hazards.”¹ Environmental disasters such as the Bhopal disaster, Donora Smog, and the Chernobyl disaster emphasize the impact of toxic chemicals on human and non-human lives. These disasters show that toxic substances that threaten the lives of all living things unconsciously seep into the soil, water, and air, causing harm to ecosystems, and entering into human and non-human bodies. Exposure to toxicity and radioactivity can happen in the blink of an eye, transmitted through the air we breathe. Don DeLillo’s novel *White Noise* presents a significant example of ecocriticism because of its striking portrayal of an airborne toxic event. This event, the appearance of a “black billowing cloud” of the fictional chemical Nyodene D, presents an environmental crisis through which relationships between air and environments can be explored.² Similar to the issues and reflections experienced after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the characters in *White Noise* experience chaos, uncertainty, and fear following the abrupt occurrence of an airborne toxic event.

Biographical Note

Mine Ömerali Uslu is a student at the Graduate Program of American Culture and Literature of Ege University. She received her bachelor’s degree in American Culture and Literature from Ege University. She is interested in ethnic studies and ecocriticism.

¹ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 62-63.

² Don Delillo, *White Noise* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998).

“Strange, Awful, Happy: A Serial (Post-)Apocalypse in HBO’s *Station Eleven* (2021)”

Susanne Köller (University of Konstanz, Germany)

Abstract

Station Eleven, an “aggressive” (Somerville) adaptation of the novel by Emily St. John Mandel, tells the story of an extinction level event—a global pandemic extinguishing 99% of humanity and the resulting fragile social and cultural structures twenty years later—in the form of a miniseries. Diverting from more formally serial narratives, it utilizes the affordances of complex episodic structuring to negotiate ambivalent questions of losing/gaining, hoping/dreading, and dying/surviving/living without offering “images of grand temporal consonance.”¹

Focusing on one episode in particular, “Goodbye My Damaged Home,” this paper will explore the series’ purposefully ambiguous framing of the apocalypse as an ongoing event, marked by repetition and duration. It represents ‘the end of the world’ as an unstable notion, dissolving clearcut definitions of before and after, endings and beginnings, utopia and dystopia and thereby “open[s] up spaces of ambiguity in apocalypse’s seamless accounts of straightforward transition from present to future,” avoiding genre tropes like the averted disaster, the dystopia-defying protagonist(s), or a world renewed and improved by cataclysm.²

When *Station Eleven*’s protagonist Kristen is poisoned, her mind returns to the outbreak of disease and its immediate aftermath in Chicago to fill an emotional as well as a narrative gap: the series’ first episode had sketched the initial chaos of the virus overtaking the city, the protagonists always one step ahead of it, then jumped forward in time twice, not revealing the presumably traumatic interim period(s). Now, following Kristen’s delirious mind, the series reveals her eighty-day period of isolation with the Chaudhary brothers as a thoroughly ambivalent time remembered both nostalgically and distraughtly, mirroring Frank Chaudhary’s assessment that, “this strange and awful time was the happiest of [his] life.”

Biographical Note

Susanne Köller is a PhD student and lecturer/Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin at the Department of British and American Studies at Universität Konstanz, Germany (having hopefully just submitted her thesis on serial neo-historical period drama when this conference takes place). Her immediate research interests include historical fiction and representation, seriality, and complexity theories, as well as questions of time and temporalities. She has previously published on the effects of narrative accumulation in *Mad Men*, representations of gender and narratively complex women in *Westworld*, and parapractic approaches to trauma (narrative) in *Peaky Blinders*.

¹ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

² Connor Pitetti, “Uses of the End of the World: Apocalypse and Postapocalypse as Narrative Modes,” *Science Fiction Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017): 437–54, <https://doi.org/10.5621/sciefictstud.44.3.0437>.

“You can't fix stupid, you can't”: The Discourse of Pro-Vaccine Advocates on TikTok in the COVID-19 Pandemic”

Vesta T. Silva (Allegheny College, USA)

Abstract

Nurse Tough Love. Dr. Kat, Epidemiologist. Dr. Noc. These are just a few of the new group of social media content creators who are using their medical titles to establish credibility in the digital debate about COVID-19 vaccination. These content creators explicitly position themselves as speaking from a place of medical certainty and authority, while simultaneously consigning their anti-vaccine opponents to a place of irrationality, prejudice, and social irresponsibility. The content creators rely on traditional conventions of expertise and authority but also dramatically break away from expectations for professional, medical, or scientific communication by engaging in direct insults and parodies of their anti-vaccination opponents. In this project, this paper analyzes the discourse of these social media medical “experts” in the ongoing debate about COVID-19 prevention and vaccination.

Unlike most vaccine promoting organizations (such as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control) who have struggled to utilize social media messaging effectively the individual content creators considered in this analysis have matched their tone and content to the sensationalized and often highly dramatized norms of platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.¹ Their content frequently features “clapping back” at individual opponents, posting mocking sketches or music, or otherwise directly calling out other content creators with different views. A 2021 article in *The Atlantic* characterizes their content messaging as “purely fun,” but I argue that something far more potentially dangerous and damaging may be spreading through these social media exchanges.² Specifically, this paper argues that these content creators seek to establish a bright line of demarcation between those who are credible, truthful, and morally good; and those who they position as ignorant, hateful, and morally bankrupt in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This separation stigmatizes large groups of people, particularly in the U.S., as unworthy of sympathy, care, or even consideration. The content creators define these “anti-vaxxers” not just in terms of their medical decision making, but also in terms of their religious identity, political ideology, and social worth in disturbing ways further polarizing a public already deeply divided on everything from masking to treatment.

Biographical Note

Vesta T. Silva earned her MA and PhD in Communication Studies from the University of Iowa. At Allegheny College, she is a Professor of Communication, Film, and Theatre and is one of the founders of the Global Health Studies program, the first undergraduate liberal arts degree program in Global Health in the United States. Her scholarship includes two main areas of focus. The first analyzes contemporary representations of science, medicine, health, and identity in American public culture, including vaccine hesitancy, reproductive medicine, and genetic technologies. She is particularly interested in the ways that public discourses work to maintain, reinforce, or challenge existing systemic structures of privilege and identity in American culture. Her second area of focus is on effective pedagogy. She is the co-author of an introductory textbook on speaking and writing and is the co-editor of the 2019 special issue of *Diversity & Democracy* focused on best practices in undergraduate Global Health education.

¹ Christian Paz, “When Your Doctor is on TikTok,” *The Atlantic*, January 23, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2022/01/tiktok-doctors-debunking-pandemic-lies/621346/>.

² Maryke S. Steffens, Adam G. Dunn, Julie Leask, and Kerrie E. Wiley, “Using social media for vaccination promotion: Practices and challenges,” *Digital Health*, 6 (January 2020).

“The Fantasy of Absolute Fluidity: The Constraints of the Airborne in *Severance* and *Station-11*”

Jasmine B. Ulmer (Wayne State University, USA)

Abstract

Without governance, we are without borders. As pandemic literature often shows, with fewer people, there are fewer boundaries as governance deteriorates and/or starts anew. Air itself, which is often the medium of the pandemic, is also without borders, but it is not without boundaries. Because air is not a governable being, it does not respect things such as national borders. However, air’s physical being can still be bound. For instance, when air touches the water, it is bound by that surface, as it moves toward the sky, it is bound by gravity.

This paper explores how fictionalized post-pandemic representations of a world without governance often fantasizes about a world without borders, yet nonetheless contains ontological beings who behave much like air: inescapably bound, only not by borders, but by boundaries. Just as the physicality of fluid ontic beings is nonetheless bound, ontological fluidity in the absence of governance is not boundless either—not availed of infinite possibilities—but similarly bound by physical constraints, yes, but more importantly by bounds of being ontological.

In Ling Ma’s *Severance* and Emily St. John Mandel’s *Station-11*, those who remain are free to travel, yet bound by survival. In *Station-11*, survivors walk across what had once been the border from Canada into the United States, migrating southward. In *Severance*, survivors travel westward across what had been the Rust Belt, also choosing a migration path alongside the geographical features. In both novels, choices in movement are driven by the boundaries of ontological being: by feasibility, survivability, even at times nostalgia, and survivors are mainly limited by how far their bodies, or their vehicles, can still go. Fluid, yet always already bound, the fantasized forgetting of the boundaries of air offers a crisis for the dwelling itself of ontological beings, unbordered as they are from the built of governance, but still ineluctably constrained by concern.

Biographical Note

Jasmine B. Ulmer (Wayne State University, USA; PhD, University of Florida) is an associate professor at Wayne State University in Detroit. Her program of research develops inclusive critical inquiry methodologies and pedagogies, aiming to foster a more diverse, inclusive, peaceful world. She has been a WSU Humanities Center Faculty Fellow and visiting scholar at Appalachian State University and Ghent University in Belgium. Her recent collaborative project, *Transdisciplinary Feminist Research Approaches: Innovations in Theory, Method, and Practice* (2020), is a collection co-edited with C. Taylor and C. Hughes on Routledge. She has also authored the book *Shared and Collaborative Practice in Qualitative Inquiry: Tiny Revolutions* (2021).

“Tracing the Spread: Film Noir and the Representation of Pandemic Outbreaks”

Anna Marta Marini (Universidad de Alcalá, Spain)

Abstract

Few films tackle the representation of pandemic outbreaks intertwining with classic American noir discourse and motifs, and two features in particular were inspired by real epidemic events. Set in New Orleans, *Panic in the Streets* depicts the advent of a plague outbreak.¹ Upon the autopsy of his body shot to death, an unknown man is identified as the index case of pneumonic plague; an officer of the U.S. Public Health Service and a police captain lead the contact tracing operations, which intertwine with the capture of the small-time criminals who killed patient zero. The script is partly based on the 1924 Los Angeles pneumonic plague outbreak, when the quick implementation of preventative measures—such as imposing quarantine, inoculating people exposed to known cases with plague antiserum, and keeping contacts under observation—led to efficient containment. *The Killer That Stalked New York* fictionalizes the 1947 New York City smallpox outbreak, contained through massive vaccination.² The film follows a fictional patient zero—who is pursued for her criminal activities and traced as spreader of the virus by the authorities—while the city cannot provide enough vaccines and the outbreak causes panic in the public.

Albeit differently, both films evidence the issues related to coping with contagion and the potential scope of the spread due to travel and the impossibility to trace all contacts. Furthermore, they deal with news coverage and public discourse, as it is made clear that the awareness of disease and its fatality is likely to induce either minimization of the pandemic threat or anomic responses in the public. In the light of discursive constructions of the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper examines the selected films foregrounding how noir elements were used to convey topics related to disease transmission, tracking, and contention.

Biographical Note

Anna Marta Marini is a PhD research fellow at the Universidad de Alcalá. Her dissertation delves into the representations of the dangers intrinsic to border-crossing and the “other side” in U.S. cinema. Her main research interests are: critical discourse analysis related to violence; representations of borderlands and Mexican American heritage; otherness re/construction in film and comics, particularly in the noir and horror genres—topics on which she has published papers and presented at international conferences. Recently, she has been working on the representation of the pandemic in U.S. popular culture, especially regarding political discourse and Latinx communities. She is currently the president of the PopMeC Association for U.S. Popular Culture Studies, and her academic editorial work includes service as chief editor for *REDEN* (dedicated to U.S. culture), advisory board member of *Jamlt!* (focused on American Studies), and editorial secretary for *Cuadernos de Cómic*.

¹ *Panic at the Streets*, directed by Elia Kazan (1950, Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 2005), DVD.

² *The Killer That Stalked New York*, directed by Earl McEvoy (1950, Culver City: Columbia Pictures, 2013), DVD.

“Fact or Fiction? Representations of the Black Death in Comics and Comic Art”

Michael A. Torregrossa (Independent Scholar, USA)

Abstract

References to the Black Death/Black Plague reoccur throughout popular culture, but there does not yet appear to be any systematic study to trace its appearance across this landscape. Hoping to contribute to a better understanding its spread in mass media, this presentation attempts to survey and categorize some of the uses of the Black Death/Black Plague in the comics medium. The primary resources for building this catalogue are the *Grand Comics Database*, the index to the Michigan State University Comics Art Collection, and the Lone Star Comics' website. For the novice, a general search in these resources will be met with disappointment. The comics tend to refer to any epidemic (and some mass incursions) as a plague, and the medium has also featured numerous characters (both heroes and villains) named the Black Death and the Black Plague. However, the goal for this paper is to share some information on the scope and variety of the more authentic corpus. Based on an “Everything” search in the *Grand Comics Database*, the comics have a rich history of referencing the Black Death beginning at least as early as the late 1930s, but estimates indicate there are under 100 examples (at least in comic books and graphic novels) that actually make real use of the event. These comics can be broken down into the following groups: Science Comics, History Comics, and Comics that Present Fictionalized Accounts of the Plague (including mundane, horror, and fantastic stories).

Biographical Note

Michael A. Torregrossa is a graduate of the Medieval Studies program at the University of Connecticut (Storrs) and works as an adjunct instructor in English in both Rhode Island and Massachusetts. His research interests include adaptation, comics, and comic art, and medievalism. Michael has presented papers on these topics at regional, national, and international conferences. In addition to his research, Michael is founder of *The Alliance for the Promotion of Research on the Matter of Britain*, *The Association for the Advancement of Scholarship and Teaching of the Medieval in Popular Culture*, and *The Northeast Alliance for Scholarship on the Fantastic*; he also serves as editor for these organizations' various blogs and moderator of their discussion lists.

“Bells and Other Airborne Dynamics of Early Modern Commonwealth”

Bridget Bartlett (University of Mississippi, USA)

Abstract

This paper considers the relationships between plague, noise pollution, and community in early modern London. In early modern London, waves of plague entailed the nearly constant ringing of church bells as the dead were memorialized. The literature of this period treats London’s bells as representative of community and human interconnectivity. At the same time that funerary bells reminded Londoners that, to quote Donne, “the bell tolls . . . for thee” because “no man is an island,” they made up the sonic background for periods of isolation from other humans.¹ To many sensory-sensitive people today, the isolation and social distancing of the COVID-19 pandemic have amounted to a respite from the onslaught of noise and other stimuli that often attend on community life. This paper considers the ways the noise-sensitive character Morose in Ben Jonson’s Jacobean city comedy *Epicene* mirrors plague-time isolation measures in his efforts to insulate himself from the noisiness both of London’s bustling economic and social scenes and of the church bells that simultaneously symbolize this communal mode of life and the airborne disease that periodically disrupted it. By reading *Epicene* among other, contemporary texts that present London’s tintinnabulous soundscape as an ambient product of sociality with morbid undertones, this paper suggests that Jonson offers a vision of harmful airborne contagion as an unavoidable reality of modern life in early-17th-century London. Jonson particularly stresses the emergent capitalism of the London he knew, and he extends this new capitalist logic to the play’s conceptualization of airborne harms. A cultural imperative for economic prosperity makes airborne harm and its representative bell-ringing a necessary component of community as a broadly positive thing.

Biographical Note

Bridget Bartlett is a writer, educator, and PhD student in English at the University of Mississippi, where they currently serve as graduate assistant for the Shakespeare Association of America. Their research focuses on disability in early modern English literature. They are particularly interested in neurodivergence and atypical sensory experience. Their current research primarily focuses on the roles of race and nation in Tudor and Stuart cultural representations of cognitive difference.

¹ John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1959).

“Ableism in the Air: Disability Panic in Stephen King’s *The Stand*” Alexis Young (Georgetown University, USA)

Abstract

This paper uses Stephen King’s famous horror novel *The Stand* to reveal how the contemporary horror genre implements the language of pandemics and contagious disease to promote ableist fears of “catching” disability. The horror novel, meant to invoke terror, villainizes its antagonist as a central function of its plot. When the antagonist is an airborne disease, and is inflicting disability and death upon its victims, the novel can be a site of production for disability panic, a fear and disgust at the possibility of becoming disabled, and a contempt for those who already are. This paper argues that *The Stand* contributes to stereotypes and misconceptions around illness-induced disability and promotes ableism through displaying disease and consequent disabilities as horrific and predatory to the able-bodied reader. This paper merges genre studies in horror, disability linguistics, and research on disease in literature to uncover how the language of the horror novel can contribute to cultural fear and hatred of disability. Sensationalizing the process of becoming disabled can create fear of real-life illness and those who suffer from it. In the era of COVID-19, it is critical to understand the consequences of portraying disability and illness as a horror novel villain through popular media. This paper demonstrates how fear of airborne disease in the horror novel can increase fear of real-life pandemics and contribute to ableist views of those suffering from illness-related disability.

Biographical Note

Alexis Young is a current MA student in English and Disability Studies at Georgetown University. She graduated from the University of Virginia with a BA in English and History in 2019. She also works in public sector consulting for Deloitte and recently published a book on addiction and the opioid epidemic in the United States. Her research interests primarily include disability, especially mental health since the 19th century. She serves as a Teaching Assistant for the Global and Comparative Literature Program and hopes to pursue a PhD after graduating from Georgetown next spring.

“The Intersection of U.S. Black Women’s Mortality, COVID, and Environmental Racism”

Tahara Coleman (Texas Woman’s University, USA)

Abstract

The COVID-19 mortality disparity between Black and White women is more significant than between white men and white women. In addition, the distinction between Black men and women is more considerable than that between white men and women. The methodology will include literature reviews that explore concepts and theories for analysis to focus on the use of systematic environmental racism to explore common narratives of biological differences to explain the differing mortality rates across gender and racial lines by exploring many other environmental factors. Last, by examining the social factors and racial disparities interpreted as markers of communities’ and individuals’ historical and ongoing oppression, this paper will explore the intersections of race, gender, and class. Through the exploration of environmental racism, factors such as the cumulative stress of multiple risk factors such as air pollution and other environmental hazards in their environment that place marginalized Black women at an increased risk of COVID-19 and death, including lack of access to medical care, densely populated living conditions, forms of employment will be analyzed in this research.

This research is significant in a couple of ways. First, it is critical to combat underlying racist, sexist, and classist values by using this research to reform our political, legal, economic, and social institutions. For instance, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted problematic institutional practices, particularly those affecting Black women. Second, evidence is indisputable that COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on Black women’s mortality, and this research will explore the intersection of COVID-19 and environmental policies that result in Black women being hardest hit by environmental problems and expose the intersections of medical racism and other systematic discriminatory practices to influence transformative intersectional environmental justice.

Biographical Note

Tahara Coleman is a Multicultural Women’s and Gender Studies MA student at Texas Woman’s University. She has a BA in African American Studies from Eastern Michigan University and a BS in Human Rights and Social Justice from Arizona State University. Black Womanism Theology, Black LGBTQ+, Reproductive Justice, Environmental Justice, Climate Change, Transformative Justice are among her research interests. Tahara has received numerous honors and awards, including an Urban Fellowship in 2022, ASU New College Scholarship in 2021, ASU Dean’s List in 2021 and 2022. Her professional affiliations include American Historical Association, National Women’s Studies Association, the Association of Black Women Historians, Human Rights Campaign, and the National Colored Women’s Association. She has conducted presentations on: “Black Women’s Agency, COVID-19, & Transformative Call to Action,” at Northern Arizona University Conference 2022; and “U.S. Environmental Racism and Reproductive Justice are Intersectional to Black Women’s Health Inequalities,” Northeastern Graduate Conference, 2022.

“Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World”

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<https://airproject.univie.ac.at>
<https://twitter.com/AirEnvProject>

This project explores air from two distinct perspectives: pollution and pandemics. While air pollution has been an issue for centuries, it is through the COVID-19 pandemic that humanity worldwide has acutely and concurrently recognized the physical presence of air. The largely airborne virus has made air dangerous, whereas such phenomena as masks, social distancing, and significantly reduced social interaction—key tools in fighting the spread of the virus—further emphasize the polluted nature of air. This interpretation parallels environmental views on air pollution as a critical global threat.

Moreover, the project examines the role of racism in perpetuating current environmental and health crises and, through race, engages with the problem of environmental justice. The project raises several concerns: How does the virus challenge and emphasize the idea of air being polluted? How does wearing masks correlate with filtering air, protecting air, and believing in clean air? How does social distancing both help fight the spread of the disease and generate the myth that we can partition air, and thus do not breathe common air? How can the danger of air infected with the virus help reinforce the alarming nature of environmental degradation, including through air pollution, and mobilize humanity to work toward a healthier environment?

The project examines the changing meanings of air through environmental and medical humanities, literary and cultural studies, race studies, and history. Via this transdisciplinary approach, it foregrounds the coronavirus as flash point for new meanings of unclean air. Tracing the history of airborne pandemics through literary and cultural narratives, the project establishes linkages among air, viruses, pollution, and the human, and thus contributes to the environmental humanities through its unique approach to planetary degradation, air pollution, and environmental health.

Organizing Committee

Dr. Tatiana Konrad, MA

Principal Investigator

Tatiana Konrad is a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna, Austria, the principal investigator of “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World,” and the editor of the “Environment, Health, and Well-being” book series at Michigan State University Press. She holds a PhD in American Studies from the University of Marburg, Germany. She was a Visiting Fellow at the University of Chicago (2022), a Visiting Researcher at the Forest History Society (2019), an Ebeling Fellow at the American Antiquarian Society (2018), and a Visiting Scholar at the University of South Alabama (2016). She is the author of *Docu-Fictions of War: U.S. Interventionism in Film and Literature* (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), the editor of *Cold War II: Hollywood's Renewed Obsession with Russia* (University Press of Mississippi, 2020) and *Transportation and the Culture of Climate Change: Accelerating Ride to Global Crisis* (West Virginia University Press, 2020), and a coeditor of *Cultures of War in Graphic Novels: Violence, Trauma, and Memory* (Rutgers University Press, 2018).

Savannah Schaufler, MSc

Project Assistant

Savannah Schaufler is a project assistant at the University of Vienna for the FWF funded project “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World.” During her studies at the University of Vienna, where she graduated with honors in Evolutionary Anthropology, she participated in several inter- and transdisciplinary projects at the intersection of cultural, human, and biological sciences. In addition, she is finishing her bachelor's degree in Cultural and Social Anthropology and has already published in peer-reviewed literature. She is also a trained paramedic and has worked as a medical assistant for several years.

Chantelle Mitchell, MA

Project Assistant

Chantelle Mitchell is a project assistant at the University of Vienna for the FWF funded project “Air and Environmental Health in the (Post-)COVID-19 World.” Her research interests across the environmental humanities include extraction, temporality, and affect. She has published with *Green Letters*, *e-flux*, *art+Australia*, *Performance Philosophy*, *On_Culture*, and *un Magazine*. She holds a Bachelor in Art History and Philosophy from the University of Western Australia, and a Masters in Curatorship from the University of Melbourne. Chantelle maintains a collaborative practice with Jaxon Waterhouse (Australia), which has seen them present at numerous Australian and international conferences, alongside exhibitions for the University of Melbourne, Edith Cowan University, Sawtooth ARI, and FELTspace, with forthcoming exhibitions across Australia.

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RACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN THE ERA OF COVID-19: RETHINKING 'SOCIAL DISTANCING'

Organized by Tatiana Konrad, Savannah Schaufler,
and Chantelle Mitchell

JULY 13-15, 2023
Virtual Conference via Zoom

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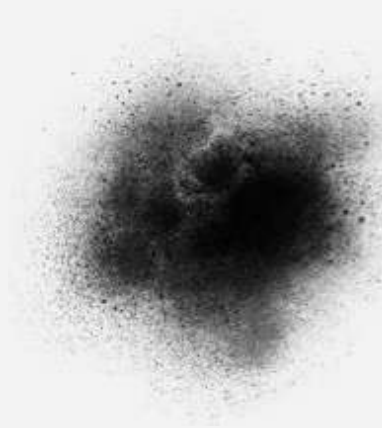
This series tackles the relationship between health and the environment, paying particular attention to changes occurring over time and across place. It seeks to illuminate the causes and consequences of human, more-than-human, and environmental ill-health, while also attending to possibilities for well-being, flourishing, and repair. Encouraging an expanded notion of health, *Environment, Health, and Well-being* presents scholarship that considers human well-being as directly correlated with health systems; extends the notion of health and well-being beyond the purely human frame; and interrogates planetary health through specific landscapes, ecologies, and human and more-than-human activities. Recognizing the ecological, political, social, and viral turbulence of our current times, the monographs and edited collections in this series look to interdisciplinary practice within the field of the environmental humanities as a way of understanding the present, reflecting upon the past, and rethinking possibilities of the future.

Environment, Health, and Well-being, while grounded in the environmental humanities, understands the barriers to environmental health as tied to legacies of extraction, consumption, colonization, and unlimited growth. It is thus especially interested in scholarship from Indigenous, race, gender and queer, and disability studies, as well as approaches that address histories and futures of labor and profit. *Environment, Health, and Well-being* welcomes projects from new and established scholars, in and outside of academia, which make visible for audiences the timeliness and necessity of interdisciplinary research on the relationships between humanity and environments. The contributions in this series capture the multifaceted nature of environmental health and foreground the importance of perpending the planet's well-being in these ecologically precarious times.

SUBMISSIONS AND QUESTIONS?

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Air and
Environmental Health
in the (Post-)COVID-19 World

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