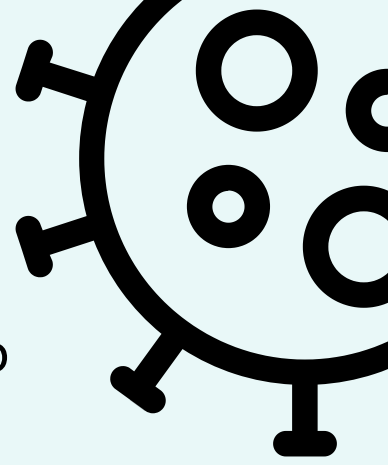
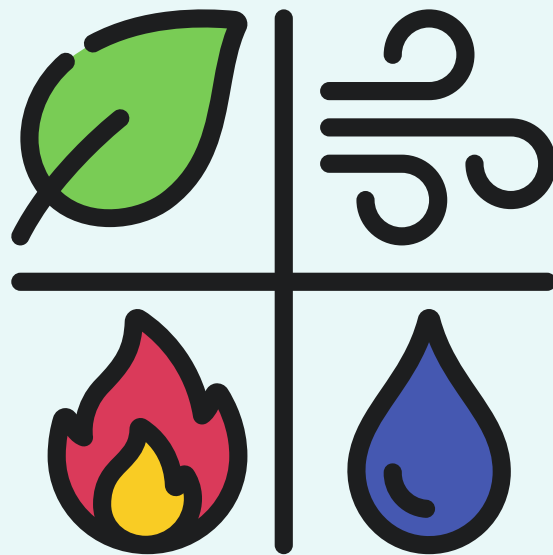


Three-Day Online Workshop

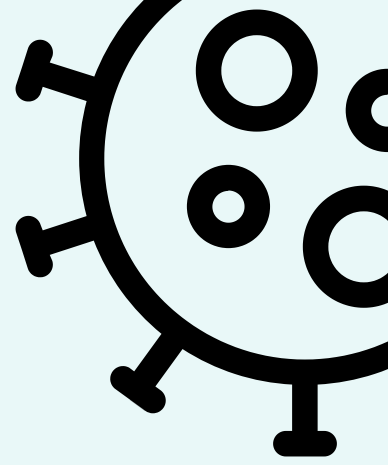


# ELEMENTS OF CONTAGION



18 - 20 January 2023

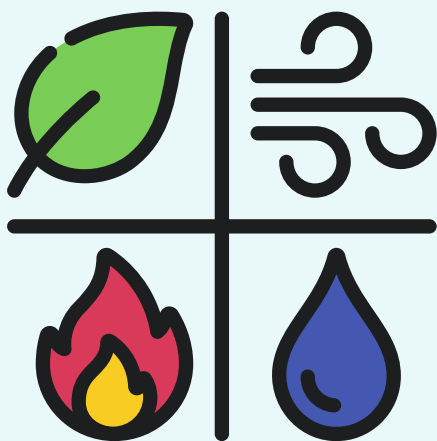
# WORKSHOP CONCEPT



The workshop, organized within the framework of the project Epidemics and Communities in Critical Theories, Artistic Practices and Speculative Fabulations of the Last Decades, financed by the Polish National Science Centre within Opus 20 funding scheme (UMO-2020/39/B/HS2/00755), takes as its starting point the growing awareness that the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is critically entangled with other manifestations of the ongoing ecological and economic crises. Studies indicate that the transmission of the virus has been strictly connected with the atmospheric conditions (Yassin et al., 2022), while instances of slow violence, such as human-induced climate change, have become more acute in the wake of Covid-19 emergency (Grove et al., 2021). The example of airborne viruses is by no means an exceptional case of such interconnections between current crises. As a host of recent studies demonstrates, feral proliferations of opportunistic viral, microbial and fungal pathogens as well as toxic contaminations due to the extractivist practices of late liberal order share a common root in the modern neo-colonial projects. In this context interconnected contagions and contaminations turn out to be not only the result of environmental damage but also an instrument of colonization that seeks to subdue humans and non-humans for the sake of unrestrained exploitation.

During this workshop we treat contagion as a condition shared by many human and more-than-human communities in the era of proliferations of pathogenic agents in people, wild, domestic and farm animals as well as agricultural and wild plants. We seek to delineate the connections between these emergences and emergencies by mapping various elements of contagion - not only the beings and substances that it comprises of and endangers, but also the means and media of its transmission (such as soil, water, fluids, and air) and preventative measures (such as fire). We treat contagion as a strategic concept that brings to the foreground the abuses and excesses of the Anthropocene, but also points to possible other, non-violent ways of being-together and working towards a livable future.





# WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Day 1,  
18 January 2023

5.00 - 6.30 p.m. (GMT + 2)

Audronė ŽUKAUSKAITĖ

(Lithuanian Culture Research Institute)

**Contagion, Immunity and the Promise of Community**

Mateusz CHABERSKI (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

**Following Lead. Epidemic as Slow Violence in the Socialist  
Anthropocene**

7.00 - 8.30 p.m. (GMT + 2)

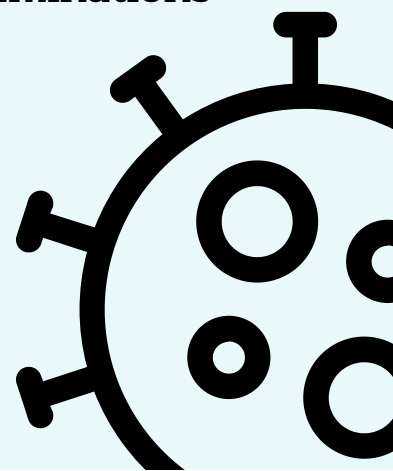
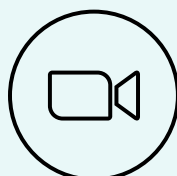
Mateusz BOROWSKI (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

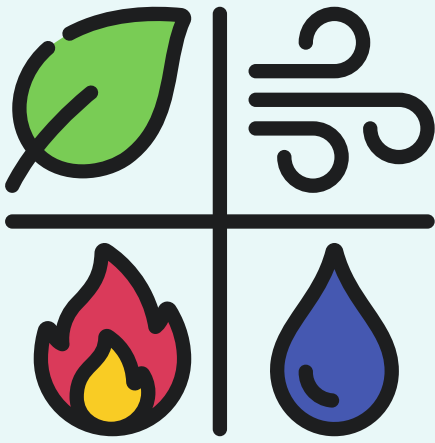
**Soil in Humans, Infective Heredity and Space Pathogens: Kim  
Stanley Robinson's "Aurora" and Contagion as First Contact**

Aleksandra BRYLSKA (University of Warsaw)

**The Threat of (In)visible Contagions. The Strategies for  
Representing the Dangers of Contemporary Contaminations**

ZOOM LINK:





# WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Day 2,  
19 January 2023

5.00 - 6.30 p.m. (GMT + 2)

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Stephen J. PYNE (Arizona State University)

**The Wildfire Spread Like a Plague: Imagining Combustion  
as Contagion**

7.00 - 8.30 p.m. (GMT + 2)

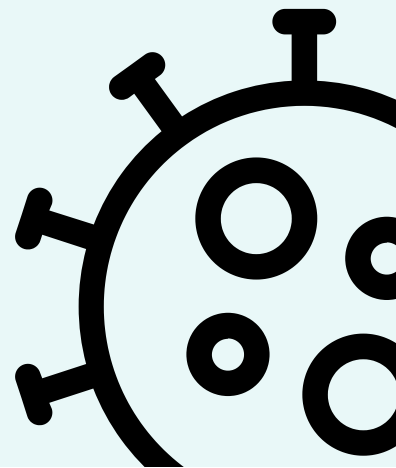
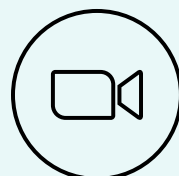
Dorota SOSNOWSKA (University of Warsaw)

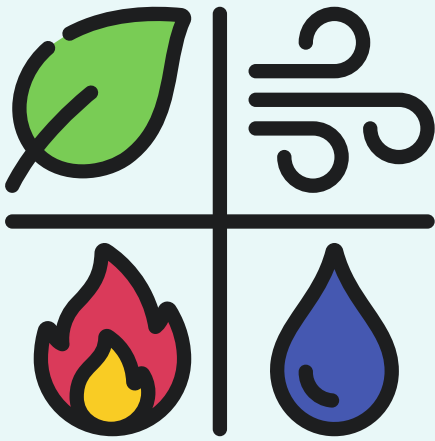
**It Flashed, Banged and Tore. The Element of Fire in the  
Polish AIDS Crisis**

Małgorzata SUGIERA (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

**Fire, Invisible Bullets, and Communication: Violence as a  
Constitutive Element of Contagion**

ZOOM LINK:





# WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

Day 3,  
20 January 2023

5.00 – 6.30 p.m. (GMT + 2)

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Caterina ALBANO (Central Saint Martins)

**Air-Borne: Contagion and ‘the Universal Right to Breathe’**

7.00 – 8.30 p.m. (GMT + 2)

Anna BARCZ

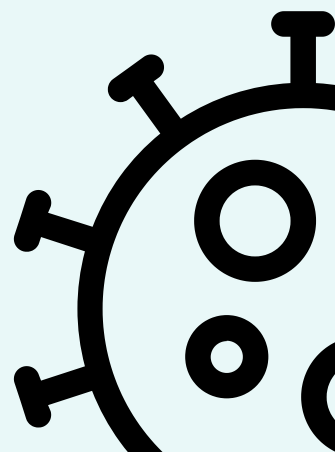
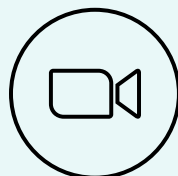
(Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences,  
Warsaw)

**River Hubs: Deep Mapping Contagion through Literature**

Kyoko IWAKI (University of Antwerp)

**Blinded Vision: Failing Remote Spectatorship**

ZOOM LINK:





# KEYNOTE LECTURES

**Caterina ALBANO (Central Saint Martins)**

**Air-Borne: Contagion and 'the Universal Right to Breathe'**

In December 2019, news of a highly infectious corona virus began to spread. In the following months, viral contagion swelled along with the media circulation of information about the growing epidemic, bringing to the fore air and the unequal access to this 'common'. 'The universal right to breathe' that Achille Mbembé invoked as a call for justice, equality and freedom, clashed with the social, environmental and racial injustice that the Sars-CoV-2 virus magnified. Through a consideration of air at the intersection of viral, environmental and affective pollution, this paper questions the implications of contagion not only as toxic diffusion but also as its opposite, as an engagement with care, reparation and resistance. We ask whether it is possible to think of air as an 'aspiration' for change - as Christina Sharpe suggests - and inhabit today's ecologies of air with both an awareness of the histories they are bound up with and a desire to counteract them.

## BIO

Caterina Albano teaches and supervises doctoral students at Central Saint Martins. She holds a PhD in Renaissance Studies (London University) and curates, lectures and publishes in the fields of art, cultural history and cultural theory and theory of curating. She is the author of "Out of Breath: Air Vulnerability in Contemporary Art", "Memory, Forgetting and the Moving Image", and "Fear and Art in the Contemporary World", and has published journal articles and essays on the history of emotion, politics of memory and contemporary art, anatomy and on curating. Her research is interdisciplinary and broadly relates art, medical sciences and culture. She critically considers science as an episteme in contemporary culture, and reflects on its currency and complexities within broader cultural contexts that include the arts and humanities. Her current research focuses on the cultural history of emotion, in particular on the contemporary 'culture fear' and related issues concerning the cultural constructions of phobias, anxiety, and trauma, amnesia and affect, on the politics of memory, and vulnerability. In her curatorial capacity, she has worked on a number of projects, including major national and international exhibitions and artist projects that explore subjects as diverse as the unconscious, the cultural history of the body; neuroscience, biogenetics and the history of genetics. Both the theory and practice of curating are central to her research and curatorial work.



# KEYNOTE LECTURES

Stephen J. PYNE (Arizona State University)

## **The Wildfire Spread Like a Plague: Imagining Combustion as Contagion**

Fire has traditionally served as a source rather than a recipient of metaphor. We say, for example, that a plague spreads like wildfire. But we might also say that a wildfire spreads like a plague because combustion is a process of contagion. Consider the wave of megafires that have afflicted so much of the Earth in recent years.

Preventing fire's spread, especially into towns, is analogous to containing the spread of covid-19. Hardening houses against embers is sunukars to wearing masks to prevent dispersing aerosols. Creating a defensible space by clearing around structures resembles social distancing. Establishing herd immunity looks like protecting enough structures to prevent spread through towns. The two varieties of contagion even have a common origin: they result from broken biotas, places where the boundary between built and natural landscapes blurs; combustion spills over from one realm into the other; and what had been a rare event or a seasonal nuisance mutates into a far-spreading threat. Underwriting both phenomena is how people change how they live on the land.

As the saying goes, all models fail, but some are useful. The same holds for metaphors. The combustion as contagion metaphor helps understand how megafires have emerged and how to protect against them. It also suggests different perspectives on how to contain the threat. Defining fire as simply a physical process - a chemical reaction shaped by its physical surroundings - invites physical responses. Remove vegetation, drop chemicals or water, devise early warning systems based on fuel loads, wind, and climate. This approach is good for protecting built environments like houses and towns, but it has conspicuously failed as a strategy for managing landscapes in the countryside or public wildlands. In fact, it creates conditions that make subsequent outbreaks more likely and more virulent. A more biologically based model would search for ecological adjustments that change the underlying conditions that make propagation possible and might adapt methods analogous to those used for public health. It would accept the inevitability of fire and the appearance of new variants.

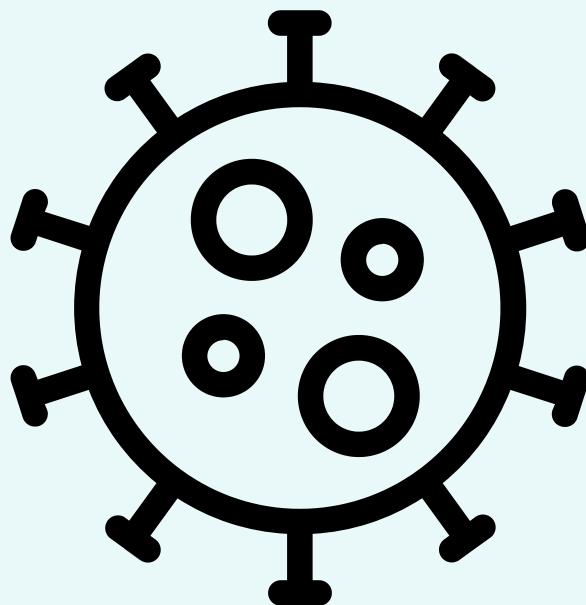


# KEYNOTE LECTURES

The conditions that favor wildfire have escalated to the point that we have created a fire age - the fire-informed equivalent of an ice age. For decades fire officers and researchers have warned that we need to live with fire. Our challenge now is to live with a fire age, or what (to introduce a final metaphor) we might call a Pyrocene.

## BIO

Stephen J. Pyne is an emeritus professor at Arizona State University. He has been at ASU since 1985. In 1986 he joined the charter faculty at ASU West, where he remained for 10 years. He transferred to the School of Life Sciences in 1999. He has published 35 books, most of them dealing with fire, but others on Antarctica, the Grand Canyon, the Voyager mission, and with his oldest daughter, an inquiry into the Pleistocene. His fire histories include surveys of America, Australia, Canada, Europe (including Russia), and the Earth. *The Ice: A Journey to Antarctica* was named by the New York Times to its 10 best books for 1987. *Fire in America: A Cultural History of Wildland and Rural Fire* won the Forest History Society's best book award. He has twice been awarded NEH Fellowships, twice been a fellow at the National Humanities Center, enjoyed a summer Fulbright Fellowship to Sweden, and has received a MacArthur Fellowship (1988-1993). In 1995 he received the Robert Kirsch Award from the Los Angeles Times for body-of-work contribution to American letters. He now lives on an urban farm in Queen Creek, Arizona where he raises Tunis sheep, chickens, and citrus.





# ABSTRACTS



**Anna BARCZ**

(Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw)

## **River Hubs: Deep Mapping Contagion through Literature**

What stories do rivers tell and what stories do humans believe in they tell? This presentation is about literary accounts of contagion as if told and defined through the river perspective.

I will attempt to respond to what is contagion in the aquacritical frame and within what I call studies on cultures of adaptation through literature. I will also demonstrate how I develop the narrative infrastructure on language of speaking about the river subjectively. It is indebted in a river-centric approach to poetics and rhetoric traditions in European sources. It is going to be performed by the aquacritical reading of literary texts referring to the case studied River Hubs. 'River Hubs' is a new concept to test a bigger research hypothesis that there are places more saturated with rivers' stories than the others because of strong human-river bonding histories (such as floods but also war ecologies).

In this presentation I will combine the method of aquacritical literary research with the so-called deep mapping method of interpreting and curating the sources on the example of the Vistula and Odra Rivers' exemplifications of contagion. Both of these methods, when merged, will disclose a multidimensional and multilayer model of the River Hub as a cultural and natural object, and at the same time develop the knowledge on the semantic contexts of river-related understanding of contagion. What is elemental in this knowledge and what can we learn from such elements as river-water narratives?

## **BIO**

Anna Barcz is a philosopher and literary scholar who works as an Assistant Professor at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw; she was the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the Trinity Long Room Hub (Trinity College Dublin) in 2018-2019, and Rachel Carson Centre Fellow (LMU, Munich) in 2019-2020. Her books include: "Environmental Cultures in Soviet East Europe: Literature, History and Memory" (Bloomsbury 2020); "Animal Narratives and Culture: Vulnerable Realism" (CSP 2017) and "Ecorealism: From Ecocriticism to Zoocriticism in Polish Literature" (in Polish, 2016). Now, she has been working on theoretical approaches that reconceptualise human-rivers relations. She published her last flood-related studies with Space and Culture and Environmental Hazards journals (to read some of these, please visit: <https://pan-pl.academia.edu/AnnaBarcz> and/or write to her: [abarcz@ihpan.edu.pl](mailto:abarcz@ihpan.edu.pl)). Twitter: @BarczAnna

# ABSTRACTS



Mateusz BOROWSKI (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)

## **Soil in Humans, Infective Heredity and Space Pathogens. Kim Stanley Robinson's *Aurora* and Contagion as First Contact**

As the probiotic turn in humanities and social sciences (Lorimer 2020), which analyses ways of managing life by means of life, is gathering momentum, the critical entanglement of eucaryotic organisms and microbes is becoming increasingly salient. The demise of microbial worlds is therefore recognized as an integral element of contemporary environmental crisis, while anti-bacterial treatments, meant to prevent contagions and the spreading of pathogens, are conceived of as “environmental events” (Landecker 2015) that turn individual human and non-human bodies into sites and agents of catastrophes. This perspective calls for significant re-evaluation of the concept of contagion as an element of purification practices of the modern era.

The present paper takes its cue from Hannah Landecker's article “Antibiotic Resistance and the Biology of History” (2015) which retells the story of antibiotic resistance from the 1950s onwards and demonstrates that the war against microbes has actually produced new bacterial contagions. In view of this Landecker argues that the main challenge of today's biopolitics is the emergence of the unexpected and undesirable effects of mechanisms of contagion control enacted on global scale. The anti-biosis of the 20th century, intended as a purification mechanism, only made humans more tightly connected with the ground, “bringing augmented soil ecologies into humans, through an infective heredity brought on by sheer physical juxtaposition ... Brought up from the earth with these bacteria are ecological dynamics that drive genome evolution and resistance”.

It is in this context that the present paper analyses Kim Stanley Robinson's “Aurora” (2015), a speculative fabulation about a failed space colonization mission, brought to its closure due to an alien pathogen in the new world in Tau Ceti system. The novel juxtaposes (and implicitly draws analogies between) this contagion and colonization strategies that employ microbes as agents of terraforming an alien planet. By reformulating the trope of first contact as contagion Robinson brings to the foreground contagion as a means of detrimental severing the link between humans and both the Earth as a planet and soil as the ground that conditions their existence.

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



**Aleksandra BRYLSKA (University of Warsaw)**

### **The Threat of (In)visible Contagions. The Strategies for Representing the Dangers of Contemporary Contaminations**

From the beginning of nuclear tests, but especially after the catastrophe which happened in Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, in global society rose the fear of invisibility. The main threat of radioactive contamination was not so much connected with the direct effects of it, but with the inability to see and to represent its nature and agency. The world after this nuclear accident became dangerous not because of its toxicity, but more because it seemed unchanged, despite the catastrophe which has happened. This specific fear of this technological contagion received the name of 'radiophobia', which - after the Chernobyl's disaster - spread globally.

I argue that this fear of invisible dangers is a characteristic more broadly applied to the contemporary contagions, not only to the contaminations connected to the radioactivity. We could observe it during the (still ongoing) SARS-COVID-19 pandemic. The main fear, apart from its fatality and possible damages to the human bodies, was connected to the fact, that the virus is invisible, so there was no sufficient way to be protected from it. 'Invisible' became 'comprehensive'. Therefore, it was crucial to visualize the danger, as its representation could help to control the contagion.

In my presentation I would like to investigate the social and artistic strategies of visualizing and dealing with the problems of contemporary contagions (which I understand broadly as a global danger to the society structures and not-only-human bodies). I will analyze how different practices and ways of representing the danger of contaminations (by pollutants, viruses etc.) helps to deal with the fear of the contagions and is a metaphorical way of taking the control over the threat.

**BIO** Aleksandra Brylska is currently a PhD student at the International Doctoral Program “Nature-Culture” at Faculty of “Artes Liberales” University of Warsaw. She is working on a dissertation concerning the natural and cultural status of post-nuclear spaces on the examples of Chernobyl’s and Fukushima’s exclusion zones. She is a head of the research grant (Bio)discourse after Catastrophe. The Natural-Cultural Status of Nuclear Disasters in Chernobyl and Fukushima (No. 2019/33/N/HS2/00268). She received the Fulbright Junior Research Award for the year 2022-2023 and is currently a Visitor Researcher at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her research interests cover environmental humanities, reflections on degraded and unwanted ecosystems and the status of waste in the Anthropocene.



**Mateusz CHABERSKI (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)**

**Following Lead. Epidemic as Slow Violence in the Socialist Anthropocene**

In 1975, the Polish pediatrician Jolanta Wadowska-Król diagnoses symptoms of lead poisoning in a rapidly growing number of children living in a working-class neighborhood of Katowice, at the heart of the industrial region of Upper Silesia. The toxic material most likely is absorbed through soil, air and water polluted by the local non-ferrous metal steelworks one of the largest manufacturers of copper and brass utilities in the then People’s Republic of Poland. Thus, any attempt to identify the source of the disease and treat it potentially threatens the dominant state narrative of the bright socialist modernity.

This paper analyses two contemporary semi-fictional narratives of the 1975 event, Michał Jędryka’s “Ołowiane dzieci. Zapomniana epidemia” [Lead children. A Forgotten Epidemic] (2020) and Marta Fox’s “Moja ołowianko, klęknij na kolanko” [My Leaden Lady, Kneel Down] (2021) to problematize the notion of an epidemic, inextricably linked to communicable disease. From the perspective of lead poisoning the epidemic is less about transmission of a pathogen than about spatio-temporal distribution of negative environmental effects of slow violence (Nixon). Drawing on contemporary environmental humanities (Fowkes and Fowkes, Tomczok) and the elemental turn in post-humanities (Murphy), the paper aims to reflect on the specificity of epidemic as slow violence in the socialist and the post-socialist context.

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



**Kyoko IWAKI (University of Antwerp)**

### **Blinded Vision: Failing Remote Spectatorship**

Tokyoites are now beclouded with the triple source of blindness: namely, radioactive, biological, and digital invisibility. First, since the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster in March 2011, the residents have been threatened by the unspecified intake of radioactive material through food and water consumption. Second, due to the novel coronavirus pandemic, the number of people who suffer in silence from unknown illnesses has surged. And third, due to the deceptive hypervisibility of digital culture, its agents have lost track of what to see and not see. The common denominator of triple blindness is that, in proportion to the expansion of nuclear, viral, and informational contagions, the almost-obsessive desire to see the invisible aggravates – which is doomed for failing spectatorship. The understanding of failing should be acknowledged rather than condemned as a mode of more-than-human spectatorship that appreciates forms of representation that go beyond the visible, legible, and thus consumable. Still more, we need to grasp the ‘viral dramaturgy’ that exacerbates the ‘spectatorship of suffering’ by developing dialogues at the intersection of affect studies, media studies, and performance analysis (Felton-Dansky 2018, Chouliaraki 2006, Ahmed 2004). In this brief talk, I will introduce a multi-disciplinary performance from post-Fukushima Japan that astutely suggests the blindness inherent in contemporary society and demonstrates how the affective economy in the contagious era anticipates a haunting yet visually failing spectatorship.

**BIO** Kyoko Iwaki is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Faculty of Letters, Arts and Sciences, Waseda University. Her postdoctoral fellowship is fully funded for three years by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS), which is the Japanese equivalent of The British Academy. She obtained a Ph.D. in Theatre and Performance from Goldsmiths, University of London in November 2017. Her Ph.D. thesis titled Nuclear Catastrophes and the Theatre in Tokyo, 1945 - 2016 was supported for three years by the Goldsmiths' Bursary Scheme. After completing her Ph.D., she became a Visiting Scholar at the Graduate Center, City University of New York (CUNY). Kyoko was appointed Chief Director of the Scene/Asia Pan-Asian critics and curators' platform in 2014. The Asian performance research conducted in this platform led her to co-curate the Spielart Festival Munich's Asia Focus in 2017. Since 2018, She is the Artistic Advisor on Japanese Theatre at Martin E. Segal Theatre Centre, City University of New York. She serves on the theatre advisory committee of the Saison Foundation, Tokyo, and International Research Center for Performing Arts, Kyoto Arts University.



**Dorota SOSNOWSKA (University of Warsaw)**

**It Flashed, Banged and Tore. The Element of Fire in the Polish AIDS Crisis**

In my talk I will refer to the events from June 1992 when the house for seropositive children founded with money from USA by Polish NGO Monar was burned by its would-be neighbors in Laski near Warsaw. It was a result of the protests against placing people with HIV in this localization, which can be seen as repetition of the protests against houses for HIV infected people held in other Polish towns already from 1989 and resulting in subsequent relocations of the seropositive inhabitants. This story of what I would like to call following Peggy Phelan (1993) this "spatial envy" can be seen as central for local history of AIDS. The role of fire became crucial in social imagination around the contagion. It found its way to film ("Pora na czarownice", 1993) and many narratives, including memorial ones ("HIVstorie. Żywe polityki HIV/AIDS w Polsce", 2022). In the proposed talk I will ask about the connection between fire, violence, class affects and mimicry in context of HIV/AIDS contagion hoping to grasp specificity of this strongly suppressed but formative experience.

**BIO** Dorota Sosnowska is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Polish Culture (Department of Theatre and Performance) at University of Warsaw. The author of the book about three actresses of the communist period in Poland entitled "Królowe PRL. Sceniczne wizerunki Ireny Eichlerówny, Niny Andrycz i Elżbiety Barszczewskiej jako modele kobiecości" (2014). She took part in the scientific projects devoted to the problem of performance documentation, theoretical status of sources, archives and documents in performance studies ("Sources and Mediations") and performance and memory ("Performing Memory"). She published articles on the subject in Polish and international journals such as "Performance Research or Maska" and co-edited a book devoted to the memory of worker's theatre ("Robotnik. Performanse pamięci", 2017). Now she is working as principal investigator on the project Odmieńcy. Performances of Otherness in Polish Transition Culture and co-investigator in the project Epidemics and Communities in Critical Theories, Artistic Practices and Speculative Fabulations of Last Decades – both financed from the Polish National Science Center. She is a co-convenor of the Theatre Historiography group and a member of IFTR from 2016.



**Małgorzata SUGIERA (Jagiellonian University, Kraków)**

**Fire, Invisible Bullets, and Communication: Violence as a Constitutive Element of Contagion**

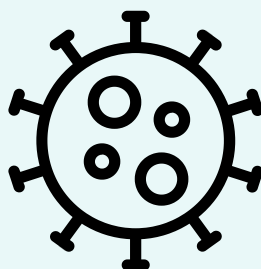
A close connection has been already established between anthropogenic climate change and terraforming understood as a process of colonisation of succeeding continents and their peoples, treated as part of local nature, easy and cheap to exploit. Those inherently ecological interventions were aimed at turning "territories that were perceived to be wastelands into terrain that fitted a European conception of productive land" (Amitav Ghosh). However, there were not only forces and ecologies of fire and water at work as agents of empires which helped to conquer the new world. British soldiers weaponized also contagious diseases, called "invisible bullets" by Native Americans, using mainly smallpox against indigenous people as well as against other White settlers. Thus, ever since microbial warfare had made an inherent part of colonial terraforming and biopolitics. For this reason, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has been often seen not only as one of those imperial agents which return with a vengeance.

The paper is, however, premised on a different view as offered by Claire Colebrook in her "Fire, Flood and Pestilence as the Condition for the Possibility of the Human" (2020). In the article, the author suggests a necessary change of the dominant perspective of defining 'the human' as.

an agent of progressive history or anthropogenic catastrophe into a more adequate recognising of 'the human' as an effect of ecological forces. In other words, she presupposes that fire, flood and pestilence of her article's title have to be perceived as "the conditions from which 'the human' emerged".

The paper follows Colebrook's suggestion to—firstly—revisit recently written histories of epidemics as a part of colonisation to read them as stories of 'the human' emergence. Secondly, it takes a closer look at Laura Jean McKay's debut novel *The Animals in That Country* (2020), mindful of the fact that communicable disease functions as an alternative name of contagion. Situated in an outback wildlife park in north-western Australia, the novel narrates a fictional 'zooflu' epidemic which enables "enhanced communication between humans and nonhuman animals". The emergence of unprecedented insight into the non-human world turns out to be not only a foundational threat to human social structures, but also to our understanding of 'the human', wryly demonstrating categorial violence of telling apart "humans and nonhumans animals"

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







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## **Contagion, Immunity and the Promise of Community**

The notion of immunity, as it was defined in biology in the middle of the 20th century, draws a boundary between the “self” and the “nonself”. In this respect the notion of immunity is the perfect metaphor for biopolitical government: similar to the immune system which fights everything that it sees as “nonself”, biopolitical power discriminates against what it sees as “different” or “other”. However, if we examine immunity not as a metaphor but as a phenomenon examined from the perspective of contemporary biology, we have to admit that immunity comprises not only a defensive reaction toward an external, contagious element, but also a positive reaction or so-called “tolerance”. Thus, the defensive model of immunity should be complemented by a positive one, interpreting immunity as being entangled in its milieu. Alfred I. Tauber suggested that immunity should be seen as an ecological system which not simply reacts toward the external element but opens the negotiations between “self” and “nonself” within the system. This model of ecological immunology is also a good methodological tool to rethink the notion of the social: instead of seeing the social as an opposition between a sovereign power and an oppressed individual, we can interpret it as a network of sympoietic interactions between heterogeneous individuals. Such an affirmative model of ecological immunology reframes the opposition between immunity and community: to acquire immunity I do not have to protect the “self” from “nonself” or “other”; on the contrary: the “other” is what makes “my” immunity possible.

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