

Viral Imaginaries Dublin

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Today more than ever, viral metaphors seem to be imbued with an infectious and contagious power that transcends all aspects of life. What kinds of imaginaries, for instance, are activated when we say that we want to 'immunise' ourselves from risk, or when the languages of parasitism or contagion infect social discourse? What forms of intersectional inequality and domination emerge through the activation of such imaginaries and discourses, and what roles do allegories of war and defence play in them? Who or what becomes legible as infectious, contagious, or contaminated?

In these talks with Dr Ilios Willemars (Centre for the Arts in Society, Leiden University), we will explore the ways in which viral imaginaries structure political and medical life. Crossing the thresholds between the biomedical sciences and the humanities, the two workshops will examine the normative and regulatory power viral metaphors hold (e.g. in defining the thresholds of pathology, grievability and stigma). The workshops will examine metaphors of virality and contagion in artistic, theoretical and scientific responses to disease, stigma and grief. They will examine art, literature and theory through the lens of virality on the one hand, and viral metaphors through artistic, theoretical and scientific objects on the other. The workshops understand the languages of contagion and virality as infecting art, literature and theory indiscriminately, thereby troubling the epistemic thresholds between these discourses.

In addition, Dr Willemars will deliver a masterclass on his own research on performative protection against contagion in the International Association for Suicide Prevention's guidelines to the media.

Refreshments will be served after the workshops, and a wine reception will follow Dr Willemars' presentation.

Materials for the workshops will be circulated at a date closer to the events.

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WORKSHOP: Vampires and Zombies: viral metaphors of parasitism and immunity

04-05-2023, 14:00-16:00

C218, Newman Building, UCD

Resisting the temptation of confronting the popular notions of contagion, contamination, and the virus head on, in this workshop we will deal with two concepts that seem secondary or peripheral to our cultural understanding of virality first: the parasite (Michel Serres), and immunity (Ed Cohen). We will have a look at a curious document produced by the US Center for Disease Control (discussed in Sara Polak) that is meant to protect the American population against Ebola titled *Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic* in an attempt to think

about the figure of the parasite in that graphic novel. We will also have a look at the way in which viral imaginaries produce a disruption of civil society and the rule of law attending to the metaphor of immunity. We will consider how that notion is first and foremost a legal and territorial concept that only recently crossed a threshold into medicine, by looking at fragments from Werner Herzog's interpretation of Dracula in *Nosferatu*.

Reading for discussion:

- Ed Cohen – “Living Before and Beyond the Law, A Reasonable Organism Defends Itself” in: *A Body Worth Defending*. 32-67.
- Michel Serres – “Rats’ Meals_Cascades” in: *The Parasite*. 3-14.

Objects of analysis:

- Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic, CDC, 2011.
<https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/6023>.
- *Nosferatu*, dir. Werner Herzog, 1979.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LF3ZwXEG45M>.

Additional Readings:

- Michel Foucault – Lectures: “11 January 1978”; “18 January 1978”; “25 January 1978” in: Lectures at the College de France 1977-1978: *Security, Territory, Population*. 1-86.
- Cary Wolfe – “Bring the Noise: The Parasite and Multiple Genealogies of Posthumanism” in: Michel Serres *The Parasite*. xi-xxviii.
<https://mediatheoryjournal.org/cary-wolfe-bring-the-noise/>.
- Sara Polak – “‘Preparedness 101: Zombie Pandemic’ and the Ebola Scare” in: *Embodying Contagion*. 41-59.

PRESENTATION: “Suicide Contagion is Real”: performative protection against contagion

04-05-2023, 16:30-17:30

H204, Humanities Institute, UCD

This presentation is about the performativity of the statement “Suicide Contagion is Real” that occurs on the first pages of a document called *Reporting on Suicide: Recommendations for the Media* published by the International Association for Suicide Prevention. This document functions as a guideline for media professionals. Its aim is to prevent “vulnerable individuals” from being negatively influenced by media coverage on suicide. The claim of “Suicide Contagion” suggests that certain ways of reporting on suicide cause the audience of such reporting to become infected or contaminated by suicide. This presentation inquires into the bond that is set up between suicide on the one hand and contagion on the other. It wonders in what ways “Suicide Contagion” becomes real, how it crosses the thresholds between scientific and cultural discourse, and in what ways its reality is mobilized to enforce measures seeking to immunize the public against the contaminative effects of the media.

WORKSHOP: Detecting Contagion: AIDS and the formation of disciplines

05-05-2023, 14:00-16:00

C218, Newman Building, UCD

In this second part of the workshop on viral imaginaries, we will continue our discussion of contagious metaphors, this time in relation to the contaminative effects of language itself (Judith Butler) in relation to homosexuality, trans*- and blackness. We will attend to the issue of visibility, (un)detectability (Nathan Lee), and representation (Jih-Fei Cheng). In doing so we will explore how, under what regime, and by which thresholds, bodies become recognizable as contagious and dangerous in relation to supposedly healthy and at risk populations. Looking at clips from the 1995 documentary *The Transformation* (Aparicio & Aikin), we will also wonder how virality and grief inflect one another in relation to the representation of HIV/AIDS. With the help of Che Gosset and Eva Hayward, we will look at how trans studies as a discipline has been able to disavow its relation to AIDS. How AIDS, in other words, has remained invisible as a result of a regime of visibility and representation that through the use of viral metaphors renders some more grievable than others.

Reading for discussion:

- Butler, Judith – “Contagious Word” in: *Excitable Speech*. 103-126.
- Che Gosset and Eva Haryward – “Trans in a Time of HIV/AIDS.” in: *TSW: Transgender Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 7, No. 4, 2020. 527-553.

Objects of analysis:

- *The Transformation*, dir. Carlos Aparicio, Susana Aikin, 1995.

Additional Readings:

- Jih-Fei Cheng – “How to Survive: AIDS and Its Afterlives in Popular Media.” in: *WSQ: Women’s Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 44, No. 1-2. 2016. 73-92.
- Nathan Lee – “Becoming- Undetectable” in: *e-flux*.
<https://www.e-flux.com/journal/44/60170/becoming-undetectable/>