

PANDEMIC GRIEF (1)

16 SEPT 2021

Grief in Public, Vulnerability, and the Political “We”

9:00 INTRODUCTION
– 9:10

TRAUMA AND DISRUPTION

9:10 Magdalena Zolkos
– 9:40 Political Theory, Frankfurt am Main/Jyväskylä
The Pandemic as a Collective Trauma

9:40 Dorothea Erbele-Küster
– 10:10 Hebrew Bible, Mainz
Memoria passionis as Reverse and Disruptive Orientation in the Hebrew Bible and the “New Normal”

COFFEE BREAK

(NO) RITUALS OF MOURNING

10:30 Martin J. M. Hoondert
– 11:00 Musicology/Theology, Tilburg
Ritualizing Death and Grief in Times of Corona

11:00 Juliane Prade-Weiss
– 11:30 Comparative Literature, Munich
Anticipatory Anxiety, Proleptic Mourning: Grieving Pandemic and Ecological Losses

COFFEE BREAK

SOLITUDE AND COMMUNITY

12:00 Dominic Angeloch
– 12:30 Comparative Literature, Frankfurt am Main
Isolation: Some Causes, Some Consequences

12:30 Tobias Heinrich
– 13:00 German Literature, Canterbury
Grieving Friends: Friendship, Mourning and Loneliness in the Age of Social Distancing

LUNCH BREAK

PORTRAYING SUFFERING

14:30 Johannes D. Kaminski
– 15:00 World Literature, Bratislava
The Wuhan Simulacrum: Fang Fang and Li Wenliang in Chinese Media Debates

15:00 Maren Scheurer
– 15:30 Comparative Literature, Frankfurt am Main
“One Great Suffering Body”: Vulnerability, Caregiving, and Grief in Emma Donoghue’s ‘The Pull of the Stars’

COFFEE BREAK

MEDIATED COMMUNITIES

16:00 Valérie Schafer
– 17:30 Digital History, C2DH, University of Luxembourg
WARCnet roundtable:
Web Archives of the COVID crisis: Digital Voices, Preservation and Loss, participants:
Nicola Bingham (The British Library, UK)
Niels Brügger (Aarhus University, Denmark)
Sophie Gebeil (Aix-Marseille University, France)
Friedel Geeraert (Royal Library of Belgium)
Claude Mussou (Ina THEQUE, France)
Jane Winters (SAS, University of London)

COFFEE BREAK

17:45 CLOSING DISCUSSION
– 18:15

The workshop *Pandemic Grief (1): Grief in Public, Vulnerability, and the Political “We”* explores the political, media, populist, and other rhetoric and poetics of community-building prompted by the losses and mourning in the wake of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The most prominent recurrent features marking a catastrophic pandemic crisis are the disruption of interpersonal contact, mass death, and impossible mourning: Thucydides notes that burial customs were disregarded in the 430–27 BC Athens plague epidemic, and the same is true for the ongoing SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Iconically illustrated by military trucks transporting coffins in the Italian city of Bergamo in April 2020, the disruption of death as a social process and the ban of common mourning rituals such as wakes have featured prominently in the global media coverage. The disruption it caused is cast both as impossibility to mourn for individuals, and as communal loss of comforting traditions impossible to recuperate. Religious gatherings, usually an important source of social coherence and comfort, could hardly follow traditions under lockdown conditions, and the absence of ritual order in the 2020 holidays of Pesach, Easter, Ramadan, Hanukkah, and Christmas has itself been perceived as loss. Calls for communal rituals to cope with mourning the losses related to SARS-Cov-2 mirror a sense of a lasting loss of social texture and solace provided by rituals, and pervasive grief over the disruption of the understanding of the world as the pandemic destabilizes health, education, and economic systems. Calls for public rituals to acknowledge collective sorrow have been met, for instance, by China’s three minute nationwide silence on the occasion of the Qingming festival in April 2020, and Spain’s ten days of mourning in May 2020. However, appeals to communal expressions of sorrow over pandemic losses are defied by

a history of the abolishment of ritual forms, especially of mourning, in the West since reformation that has been globalized with colonization, capitalism, and the mass death of World War One, and regionally intensified with the ongoing HIV/Aids pandemic. Even the digitalization of mourning inspired by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic may appear symptomatic of Modernity’s attempt to keep mortality and mourning at bay. During the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, political rhetoric has invoked national unity, often in an imagery of war. This emphasizes that what needs addressing with regard to the psychosocial impact of the pandemic is the experience of global vulnerability impossible to contain by singling out vulnerable groups and regions as supposedly standing out against a resilient majority.

The workshop features readings of media, artistic, political and other responses to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic that negotiate pandemic loss and grief. While the pandemic is commonly perceived as novelty, responses to its psychosocial impact cannot but rely on established cultural patterns of negotiating crisis and loss in the literary canon, scriptural and philosophical tradition, aesthetic and psychoanalytic theory. Emphasizing affectability as fundamental human condition, the workshop is based on the rationale that the pandemic calls for a notion of resilience as adaption rather than resistance, and that the hermeneutical tradition linking different humanities fields provides a robust model for adaption: for transferring testimonies of past experience to unprecedented purposes.

ORGANIZATION

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