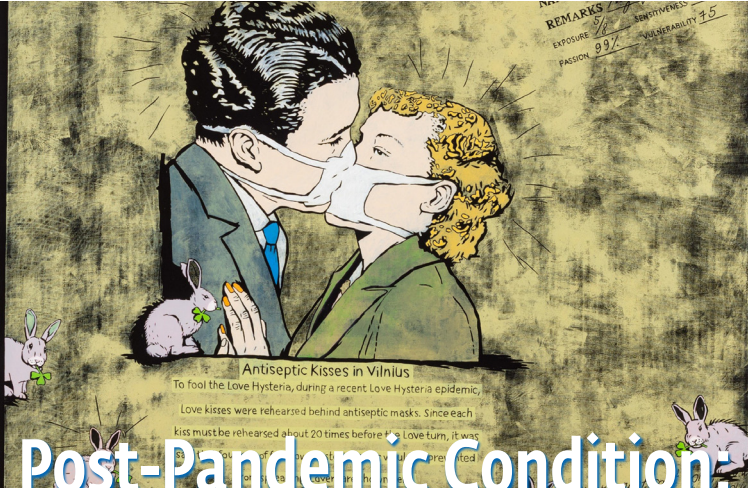


International
Conference

Laisvė Saliūte. (Melodramos. Biūtišys, 2015)



Post-Pandemic Condition: Biopolitics in the Aftermath of the COVID-19

7 September,
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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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Incapable of Learning or Trade of Life

A year before his death, Jean Luc Nancy wrote: "In the same way in which there is a market for goods, there is also one for life, sickness, aging and death". Capitalism, by secularizing the theological paradigm of salvation, has already eliminated the idea of "eternity", replacing it with the idea of "long life" for the "chosen rich". We trade life and death in many ways. Here are some simple examples of this trade. The virus arrives by airplane with the rich and explodes among the poor. We respond to the vision of a climate catastrophe with the "logic of postponement" and denial (because it affects the "young" and the "poor"), and to the pandemic with the "logic of the state of exception" and lockdown (because it concerns the "rich" and the "old"). We probably still remember the events of June this year, when the media told two stories about two disasters at the same time. One was about the submarine "Titan", which was supposed to take five billionaires to the wreck of the "Titanic". The "adventurous millionaires" died in a "catastrophic implosion". We know their names and we know how much the "ticket" to "Titan" cost. At the same time, as the public was abuzz with the calculations of how long a Jules Verne-worthy expedition would last on oxygen, a rusty, old fishing boat carrying refugees sank off the southern coast of Greece. The coast guard rescued 104 refugees – including Egyptians, Syrians, Pakistanis, Afghans and Palestinians – and recovered 79 dead bodies. However, it is assumed that there were "over 500 people" on the boat. According to the "International Organization for Migration" (IOM), nearly 3,800 people died on the migration routes to the Middle East and North Africa last year. These are anonymous, nameless and unmourned deaths. In my talk, I would like to reflect (following G. Agamben, J. Butler, M. Foucault, J.-L. Nancy, and P. Virlio) on these different forms of "trading" in life and our "media attention" devoted to disasters. However, my aim is not to stimulate the apocalyptic imagination but to rethink our human (in)ability to "learn from disasters". Are "we" (non-learners) condemned to what K. Marx called the *mors immortalis* ["deathless death"] of capital, and trading life is our ultimate destiny?

Szymon Wróbel is a Full Professor of philosophy at the Faculty of *Artes Liberales* at the University of Warsaw and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. He is the author of numerous books and articles published in various academic journals. His books in English include: *Deferring the Self* and *Grammar and Glamor of Cooperation*, published in 2013 and 2015. In Polish: *Ćwiczenia z przyjaźni (Exercises in Friendship)*, *Lektury retroaktywne (Retroactive Readings)* and *Polska pozycja depresyjna (Polish Depressive Position)*, published by Kraków Publishing House Universitas. In 2016, IFiS PAN published his book, *Filozof i terytorium (Philosopher and Territory)* on the Warsaw School of Historians of Ideas. Together with Krzysztof Skonieczny, he is co-editor of three books – *Atheism Revisited. Rethinking Modernity and Inventing New Modes of Life* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020) and *Living and Thinking in the Post-Digital World* (Universitas, 2021), *Regimes of Capital in the Postdigital Age* (Routledge, 2023). Currently, he is the Director of the experimental Laboratory of Techno-Humanities at the Faculty of *Artes Liberales*, where he has been realizing the project “Technology and Socialization” - Technology and Socialization – Techno-Humanities Lab Research Project (uw.edu.pl) ORCID: 0000-0002-2764-5648.

Denis Petrina

Epidemiological or Epistemological Crisis? (Re)thinking the COVID-19 Pandemic With and Beyond Foucault

The sudden emergence of COVID-19 was not just a social, economic, and political crisis, but also a philosophical one. On the one hand, Foucault's insightful observations on the correlation between mass epidemics and the formation of power apparatuses were revisited by many thinkers, as well as his notion of the securitarian biopolitical paradigm that prioritizes preserving life at any cost, which arguably became the ideological motto of managing the pandemic. On the other hand, the outbreak raised pressing questions and sparked heated debates about whether it represented the return of the "new old biopolitics" or the emergence of a new biopolitical dispositif, which necessitates further philosophical inquiry. This paper draws on Foucauldian biopolitical theory to argue that the *epistemological* dimension of the COVID-19 epidemiological crisis has been overlooked. In my presentation, I will juxtapose the concepts of "epidemiology as epistemology" and "epistemology as epidemiology" to uncover the onto-epistemic foundations of the COVID-19 crisis. This understanding will enable a reexamination of Foucault's final remark on "the erosion of man" in *The Order of Things*, in light of ongoing ecological disasters.

Denis Petrina is a researcher at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute's Department of Contemporary Philosophy. He completed his doctoral degree in philosophy at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2022. His doctoral dissertation explores the philosophical interpretations and (bio)political implications of the notion of affect. His publications focus mostly on affect theory in the contexts of both classical and contemporary philosophy, as well as (re)interpretations of biopolitics. His research interests include affect theory, theory of subjectivity, biopolitics, media studies, sexuality, and queer studies, as well as non-classical epistemologies. Email: denis.petrina@lkti.lt

COVID-19, Climate and the Fragile Possibility of Politics

During the lockdowns and other emergency measures imposed by governments to slow down the spread of the epidemic, something curious happened to the Western political imagination: the crisis was perceived by some as a return to politics in its true sense. Instead of lamenting state interventions as dangerous reinforcement of the biopolitical regime of control (as Agamben did), some, including Slavoj Žižek and Andreas Malm, saw in the crisis a window to escape the business-as-usual of advanced capitalism and its contradictions, a possibility for authentic politics. Politics in this sense is understood as a rare occasion when truly alternative courses of action can be chosen, with competing visions of what society might look like. Pandemics shattered many of the taboos of late capitalism: states, it now seemed, could indeed intervene in markets, control industries, close down large sections of the economy deemed unnecessary, and mobilise vast resources to meet pressing needs. Instead of party politics, scientific discourse and international organizations took central stage. Žižek saw the pandemic as a chance for communism and global cooperation, Andreas Malm theorized the possibility of a global war communism that would mobilise the resources for economic and social transformation to finally address climate collapse.

However, if it was often argued during months of lockdown that there would be no return to the pre-pandemic business as usual, that is exactly what has happened since the lockdowns ended. The window of opportunity for political action seems to have closed as quickly as it has opened. Moreover, it was not progressive forces that finally gained strength, but various radical right-wing groups and nationalist ideologies. Climate collapse continues to worsen, yet the kind of politics theorized during the pandemic crises seems nowhere in sight.

In this paper I will re-examine the texts written by Slavoj Žižek and Andreas Malm during the early stages of the pandemic, when the crisis seemed pregnant with possibilities. From a contemporary perspective, marked by further disintegration of global cooperation and militaristic escalations, we must ask what lessons

from these philosophical interventions remain valuable for thinking about the possibility of politics in late capitalist societies?

Egidijus Mardosas is a postdoctoral research fellow at Vilnius University, Department of Philosophy. In 2017 Egidijus Mardosas successfully defended his PhD thesis "Alasdair MacIntyre's Revolutionary Aristotelianism: Politics of Emancipation, Community and the Good" at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas. E. Mardosas taught at Mykolas Romeris University, later joined Vilnius University Department of Philosophy in 2020 with a postdoctoral project "Ideology and Practical Rationality: a Neo-Aristotelian Approach". Since 2022 he is a postdoctoral fellow with a project "The Anthropocene and the Emergence of Eco-Marxism". In 2022 he was awarded the Emerging Scholar award by the New Directions in Humanities Research Network. Dr. Mardosas is also a member of the editorial board for LŪŽIS – Journal of culture and politics, ecology section editor. His current research focuses on the Anthropocene and eco-Marxism.

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Hybrid Warfare and Political Crisis Communication

In the realm of post-pandemics, “the new normal”, fake news, post-truths, hybrid and conventional wars, political crisis communication naturally reappears as one of the key processes of emerging political disasters around the world. In particular, the characteristics and dynamics of hybrid warfare lend tangible weight to otherwise highly abstract and worn-out biopolitical notions of *power*, *discipline*, and *control*. I argue that post-Foucauldian biopolitical theory and crisis communication studies can be mutually inclusive, and the key premise for their incorporation is a concept of *trust*.

Perhaps ironically, trust is an indeterminate but necessary mediator behind any exercise of power, discipline and control within or over the public, and any long-term political achievement or goal depends on trust performance throughout the political system. In other words, my goal relies on a compelling infiltration of Niklas Luhmann’s social theory of trust and power into contemporary biopolitics and crisis communication analysis by implementing the very performativity of a hybrid warfare itself. In this case, the conceptualization of hybrid warfare reinvents and sets in motion the Mertonian notion of self-fulfilling prophecy: trust, by being a parameter of a social system’s capacity to function in an expected way, forces heterogeneous cooperation of subsystems and individuals, but since the outcomes of cooperation are highly unpredictable (especially in crises), expectations can also be shifted, modified or abandoned, thus creating new sets of goals or coordinated actions.

Trust fulfils any promise to the extent that it is being generated through social interactions: hence its performativity, i.e. the active formation, or enforcement of an ongoing reality, which routinely discredits the idea of a *correct definition of the objective situation* as irrelevant and obsolete. Consequently, political crisis communication better serves its purpose if equipped with a more adequate understanding of hybrid warfare “logic”, which specifically targets networks of trust.

Evaldas Juozelis is a lecturer at the Department of Bioethics at Lithuanian University of Health Sciences. Research interests: politics and sociology of science, conspiracy theories, posthumanism.

Mateusz Borowski and Małgorzata Sugiera

*Epidemic in/as the Anthropocene: An Alter(ed) Perspective
on Biopolitics after the COVID-19 Pandemic*

The volume *Endemic: Essays in Contagious Theory* (2016) highlighted the paradox of “the persistence of contagious rhetoric and logic in a society that has ideologically construed itself as impervious to infectious disease”. The COVID-19 pandemic not only confirmed the argument proposed in this book that contagion is operant through an endemic prevalence in discourse and society. Moreover this pandemic, conceived as the result of detrimental global environmental damage of anthropogenic origin, revealed its connections with other epidemics of natural, social, and environmental diseases. All of them are, in fact, the result of biopolitical policies and regulatory strategies that affect individuals and populations, which invites a reflection on the place of epidemics within Anthropocene studies.

In our paper we address these issues through a reading of the film *The Mermaids* (2017) by the Karrabing Film Collective, presented in the form of a two-channel installation during the group’s 2023 retrospective at the Haus der Kunst in Munich. Set in the lands of Aboriginal people of the Western Australia, the film depicts an epidemic of an illness affecting only white people. The illness is a clear manifestation of environmental damage in the era called Anthropocene. The epidemic reveals several mechanisms of systemic oppression and slow violence that are endemic in the societies grappling with the persistence of colonial past and the legacy of biopolitics. In our reading, the film is shown alongside a newly introduced montage of documentary materials about causes of environmental damage and rampant toxicity and puts the epidemic and the Anthropocene on equal footing. These materials invite a new reading of the relationship, shedding light on the urgent changes in the concept of biopolitics after the COVID-19 pandemic, by inscribing it in the horizon of ancestral catastrophe described by Elizabeth A. Povinelli in her *Between Gaia and Ground* (2021).

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 primary interests include green humanities, counterfactual discourses and speculative fabulations within the context of climate change. He has published, among other works, *Strategies of Forgetting: Memory and Cyberculture* (2015) and, with Małgorzata Sugiera, *Artificial Natures. Performances of Technoscience and Arts* (2017). At present, he holds the position of Principal Investigator in the OPUS 22 research project titled *After Climate Crisis. Non-Scalable Survival Strategies in Speculative Fabulations of the Last Two Decades* (2022-2026) funded by the Polish National Science Center.

Małgorzata Sugiera is a Full Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland, and Head of the Department of Performativity Studies. She has been a Research Fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, the DAAD, the American Andrew Mellon Foundation, and the International Research Center "Interweaving Performance Cultures" at the Freie Universität in Berlin. Her research focuses on theories of performativity, speculative and decolonial studies, especially in the context of the history of science. She has published and co-edited several books in Polish as well as in English and German, most recently *Crisis and Communitas: Performative Concepts of Commonality in Arts and Politics* (Routledge, 2023). She is currently conducting 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).

Dorota Sosnowska

On the Shadow Pandemic of Domestic Violence and the Biopolitics of COVID-19

In her recent book *On Violence and on Violence Against Women* (2021), Jacqueline Rose recalls that “massively aggravated [domestic violence] during the pandemic, when lockdown trapped women with abusive partners in their homes (a global phenomenon which stretched from the UK and US to China and Spain)”. She shows how the home became a trap for women. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s analysis of ancient Greek democracy, Rose goes on to argue that the home itself is a source of violence and must be left in order to be free. In Arendt’s view, politics is a way of escaping home, which is reserved for men. But they are able to govern democratically in the public sphere also because they remain tyrants at home, directing violence against women and children. From this perspective – the pandemic of domestic violence – I propose to look at two examples of Polish feminist art from 2021, which, in my opinion, are strongly influenced by the experience of lockdown. *Heksy* – a novel written by Agnieszka Szpila – while telling the history of a women haunted by the ghosts of XVI-century heroines living a life in nature, tortured and killed by men as witches, contains direct references to the COVID-19 lockdown. *Larva* – performance by Marta Ziótek does not, although it premiered when testing, masks, and temperature control were still mandatory. Both examples show women leaving their homes, their “civilized” environments, their clothes, in order to establish new, also sexual, relationships with the natural environment, which require new biopolitical frameworks. Their bodies are redefined in contact with trees, grass, water, and plants. Their identities change, and their everyday practices are disentangled from the idea of home and connected to the unlimited space of the outside. In my paper, I will argue that these artistic realizations form alternatives to the public sphere and its politics offering models of more-than-human communities, sexualities and identities as a response to the COVID-19 and the shadow pandemic of violence.

Dorota Sosnowska is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Polish Culture (Department of Theatre and Performance) at the University of Warsaw. She is 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 participated in the scientific projects devoted to the problem of performance documentation, the theoretical status of sources, archives and documents in performance studies ("Sources and mediations") and performance and memory ("Performing Memory"). She has published articles on this topic 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). She is currently working as a senior researcher on the project *Odmieńcy. Performances of Otherness in Polish Transition Culture* and a co-researcher on the project *Epidemics and Communities in Critical Theories, Artistic Practices and Speculative Fabulations of Last Decades*, both funded by the Polish National Science Center. She is a member of the editorial board of the "View. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture" journal.

Corrado Piroddi

Epidemics and Pandemics as Social Pathologies: A Critical-Naturalist Proposal

Humans have developed a certain tolerance to microparasites, such as intestines bacteria, that do not adversely affect humans. However, such a mutual relationship of harmlessness between the host and parasite is not a necessary and inevitable result. Some human parasites, such as the malaria plasmodium, continue to cause serious harm to humans after centuries of coexistence. Is there a natural balance between hosts and microparasites? What are the social consequences of a possible disruption of this equilibrium?

The paper discusses whether natural phenomena such as epidemics and pandemics of infectious diseases can be interpreted as social pathologies. While providing answers to the above questions, the paper attempts to define a set of criteria – the rupture of biological normativity and the evaluation of the social impact of epidemics – that can help to determine under what circumstances such natural phenomena fall under the label of “social pathologies.”

More specifically, this paper will argue that an epidemic or pandemic disease can only be considered a social pathology if it fulfills two conditions. The first condition is necessary but not sufficient: the biological imbalance between microparasites and human hosts that are immunologically naïve. The second condition consists of several criteria related to the social impact of epidemics. The more bars a particular epidemic disease satisfies, showing socio-pathological characteristics (SPC), the more the epidemic pathology is social.

Corrado Piroddi is a postdoctoral research fellow at Tampere University. He defended a doctoral dissertation (monograph) *Towards a Critical Social Ontology: A Study on Pierre Bourdieu and Axel Honneth* in 2020. Recently he is working on postdoctoral project to examine the problems related to health justice and equity, which are currently pivotal in the public debate related to the COVID-19 pandemic, from a perspective that is sensitive to the theory of recognition and critical theory. Email: corrado.piroddi@tuni.fi

Krzysztof Skonieczny

Who Emerges After the Pandemic? The Subject Between Biopolitics, Technology and New Technologies of the Self

In *The Revenge of the Real*, Benjamin Bratton proclaimed the intellectual bankruptcy of knee-jerk biopolitical critique best exemplified by Giorgio Agamben's early texts on COVID-19. Bratton points out two problems – (1) that such a critique fails to recognise positive (or at least necessary) elements of biopolitics, and (2) that it is based on the very concept of the subject that it seeks to transcend – the autonomous, individual self whose autonomy is threatened by biopolitical control. Unfortunately, the book does not offer a positive program on the second point. Apart from the observation that we should accept our entanglement with nature in its many forms, Bratton does not seem to focus on the kind of subject that emerges (or can emerge) from the pandemic – and the possibilities that biopolitical analysis (without its “paranoiac” dimension) offers for the understanding of this subject.

In my paper, I will try to provide a tentative answer to the question “what subject emerges after the pandemic?”, given the number of subject-forming influences that the event has helped uncover. I will focus primarily on (1) the “biopolitical” level, both in terms of the entanglement with “nature” and the pandemic measures; (2) the proliferation of technological tools and mediations that followed the COVID-19 lockdowns; (3) the “technologies of the self” that can be used by subjects to constitute themselves in this new context.

Krzysztof Skonieczny is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw. He is the author of *Immanence and the Animal. A Conceptual Inquiry* (Routledge, 2020) and co-editor (with Szymon Wróbel) of *Atheism Revisited. Rethinking Modernity and Inventing New Modes of Life* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), *Living and Thinking in the Post-Digital World. Theories, Experiences, Expectations* (Universitas, 2021), and *Regimes of Capital in the Post-Digital Age* (Routledge, 2023). He is currently leading the Polish team in the international research grant *Education at the Frontiers of the Human. The Challenge of New Technologies* (OPUS LAP/WEAVE 2022–2025).

Aistis Žekevičius

The Universal Right to Life and the (Im)Possibility of Planetary Biopolitics

In March 2020, as countries around the world closed their borders and planes increasingly emptied the sky, it was already clear that the temporary isolation of countries and strict quarantine of populations would not be enough to contain the planetary spread of a deadly virus, raising legitimate questions about the universality of the right to life. In the aftermath of the pandemic, it is apparent that the *think globally, act locally* paradigm was ineffective in dealing with COVID-19. However, one must acknowledge that truly global thinking, which would include not only populations but also entire ecosystems, has long been absent not only from the actual politics but also from the biopolitical theory. This presentation draws on biopolitical and postcolonial theory, including the work of Achille Mbembe and Benjamin Bratton, among others, to trace the many ways in which the pandemic biopolitics has failed to implement the universal right to live and demonstrate the (im)possibility of planetary biopolitics, on the one hand, as well as to question the theoretical possibility of developing one in the near future, on the other.

Aistis Žekevičius is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Contemporary Philosophy of the Lithuanian Cultural Research Institute. Currently, he is working on a doctoral dissertation that focuses on the interplay between biopolitics and race. Other areas of his research interests include algorithmic governance and posthumanism. His most recent publications: "Algorithmic Governmentality: Implications, Strategies of Resistance and Relationship with Biopower" (*Athena: Philosophical Studies*, No. 16, 2021); "Pandemic and Race: Un(fo)reseen Circumstances, Same Old Biopolitics of Extraction and Use?" (*Athena: Philosophical Studies*, No. 17, 2022). Email: aistis.zekevicius@gmail.com

Audronė Žukauskaitė

Transindividual Potentiality: Biopolitics in the Anthropocene

The recent post-pandemic condition forces us to abandon the idea of the insular and autonomous individual and to conceptualize new forms of common existence. However, it is important to ask what the nature of this commonality is. This common existence is defined as “common immunity” (Roberto Esposito), the holobiont (Bruno Latour), or the transindividual (Gilbert Simondon, Étienne Balibar). The notions of “common immunity” and the holobiont refer to the biological dimension of commonality, while the notion of the transindividual offers some political potential. In my talk, I will focus on this political dimension of the transindividual and ask what it means to be a transindividual today.

Audronė Žukauskaitė is a Chief Researcher at the Lithuanian Culture Research Institute. Her recent publications include the monographs *Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's Philosophy: The Logic of Multiplicity* (in Lithuanian, 2011), and *From Biopolitics to Biophilosophy* (in Lithuanian, 2016). She has also co-edited (with S. E. Wilmer) *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism* (Oxford UP, 2010); *Deleuze and Beckett* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), *Resisting Biopolitics: Philosophical, Political and Performative Strategies* (Routledge, 2016; 2018), and *Life in the Posthuman Condition: Critical Responses to the Anthropocene* (Edinburgh UP, 2023). Her latest monograph *Organism-Oriented Ontology* will be published by Edinburgh University Press in August 2023. Her research interests include contemporary philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, biopolitics, biophilosophy, posthumanism, and the Anthropocene.

Rein Raud

Mask/Off: Privacy, Solidarity and Individual Liberty in the (Post)Pandemic World

One of the central sources of controversy during the global COVID-19 pandemic was the necessity to wear masks in public areas. In some individualistic Western societies, notably the US, mandatory masks have been perceived as the restriction of individual liberty, while in some solidaristic Asian societies, such as Japan, the percentage of people who prefer to wear masks in public has not decreased significantly even when the immediate health hazards have subsided. In my talk, I will try to sketch the contours of a comparative biopolitics of the face, as it is caught between the enforcement of (de-individualizing) masks and new modes of (de-anonymizing) surveillance enabled by facial recognition software, which predictably elicit different responses in different cultural contexts.

Rein Raud is a research professor at the School of Humanities, Tallinn University. Raud has published a large number of scientific books and articles, in addition to 7 works of fiction and 4 poetry collections in Estonian. He has also translated a significant number of fiction books from Japanese, Chinese, French, Italian, Finnish and Lithuanian into Estonian; Rein Raud has also published literary criticism articles and essays in the Estonian press. His recent academic publications include the monographs *Being in Flux: A Post-Anthropocentric Ontology of the Self* (Polity, 2021), *Meaning in Action* (Polity, 2016); *Practices of Selfhood* (with Zygmunt Bauman, Polity, 2015).