

## 'The Plague' – Diagnostics, Aesthetics and Politics of the Pandemic

Reading Group

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### Preamble

The idea of this reading group was born during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe in spring 2020, in a time of global fear, increasing infection rates and death tolls. However, the current pandemic is anything but a singular event. Throughout history, mankind was hit hard by numerous plagues and epidemic outbreaks. These plagues were accompanied by even more numerous texts dealing with it in quite different forms and style. Scientific discourses intermingle with autobiographical literature, historical accounts and critical analyses, trying to carve out the power-laden and political side of diseases. The reading group wants to consider these discourses and to discuss different problematizations of the epidemic. Prior attempts to deal with and to organize a pandemic (as well as failures to do so) tell us not only something about diseases. They also teach us about societal power, organizational control and individual subjugation and the discursive fabric of nature, culture and its mastery.

### Directions

The reading group wants to discuss three broad strands of documents, texts and other material.

- First, we want to take a closer look at literature which deals with diagnostics and aetiologies of the diseases. Controversies about the 'nature' of epidemic outbreaks, their roots and causes have widespread consequences for the handling of the diseases and the value of scientific methods, paradigms and worldviews.
- Furthermore, we'd like to turn to autobiographical and fictional writings as well as to other representations of epidemics in popular culture. This aesthetics or aesthetication has a great impact on the framing of diseases and pandemics in popular discourse and in the society at large.
- Finally, we consider analytics of the politics of the plague. That is, texts which turn to and on the question of governing and controlling disease. Thus, topics like security, disciplinary

mechanisms, panopticism and biopolitics are of interest here. These politics of the plague attempt to organize time, space, the milieu, the town or whole populations confronted with a disease. But the disease is itself a blueprint to stabilize power relation and societal domination.

We assume that the diagnostics, aesthetics and politics of the pandemic form an interdiscursive web and a dispositif, which emerges in a state of emergency and frames the collective problematization of an epidemic crisis. The exemplary reconstruction of this web can teach us about the historical forms of organizing a pandemic and shed light on its current handling.

### Format and Schedule (to be continued)

The reading group meets once a week and discusses selected texts and other kind of materials. The group is open to anyone interested in the topic and is happy for suggestions of texts to discuss as well as to get into dialogue with scholars from other fields than management and organization studies. Thus, the following schedule encompasses a number of introductory sessions and will be updated on a regular basis.

Date	Topic	Text(s)
2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2020  10:00-11:30 am (GMT)	Introduction to Theme 1 - <b>Intersection of Camus's <i>The Plague</i> and Foucault's governmentality writings</b>	Core Reading:  Camus, Albert (1947). <i>The Plague</i> , 1-58  Additional Reading:  Foucault, Michel (2003). Lecture from 17 <sup>th</sup> March 1976. In: <i>Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976.</i>
9 <sup>th</sup> June 2020  11:00-12:30 am (GMT)	Introduction to Theme 2 - <b>Defoes' work, Foucault and the regulation of time, space and mind</b>	Core Reading:  McKinlay, Alan (2009). "Foucault, Plague, Defoe." <i>Culture and Organization</i> 15(2), 167-184.  Additional Reading:  Defoe, Daniel (1722): <i>A Journal of the Plague Year</i> , 9-17 & 95-103
16 <sup>th</sup> June 2020  10:00-11:30 am (GMT)	Introduction to Theme 3 - <b>Aetiology/diagnostics, the Cell and biopolitical power</b>	Core Reading:  Foucault, Michel (2014): <i>The Politics of Health in the Eighteenth Century.</i> In: <i>Foucault Studies</i> 18, 113-127.  Additional Reading:

		Manchester, Keith L. (2001): Antoine Béchamp: père de la biologie. Oui ou non? In: Endeavour 25(1): 68-73.
23 <sup>rd</sup> June  (time TBA)	Interlude – The Plague on Screen	The Plague (1992). Director: Luis Puenzo.

### **Virtual meeting space and joining instructions**

Our weekly sessions will be held on Microsoft Teams. If you would like to join please email us and we will add you to the Team. In the shared folder on Teams you will also find access to the texts that we will be reading and discussing.

### **Contact**

Please feel free to contact any of the organizers below, including if you have suggestions for readings and or have difficulties with the technology and accessing the materials.

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