

The Covid-19 multiverse. How the Pandemic reshaped our reality. Editors' note

Robert Gabriel ELEKES¹, Cristian PRALEA²

The Covid-19 pandemic imposed a new relativity on everything that humanity considered as being normal, self-evident and certain. It forced us to rethink social interaction, our relationship with nature, our professional life, and education. It challenged notions like liberty, democracy, freedom of speech, the sanctity of life and the sanctity of economy. It compelled us to look from a different vantage point at loneliness, solidarity and comfort, and exposed the parallel universes that inequality, radicalism and disinformation can create within our national and global community. Humanity will win the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, but the true revelation of 2020 is that human society must deal with, and fight against, the systemic problems that manifested themselves so aggressively during the last months.

As divisive as this pandemic was for our contemporary society, as much as it shattered our reality in many distinct problematic clusters, as much as it divided us, it also offered a new hope for global unity, empathy and solidarity. As fragmented the Covid-19 multiverse might be, it is in itself a whole.

With this issue of the Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov (Series IV, Philology and Cultural Studies), we set out to forward a multifaceted analysis of the pandemic and its impact on our reality, to give an interdisciplinary, international and yet interdependent account of the sheer plurality of issues that arose in 2020, and to show that a multitude of perspectives must not necessarily create a divide, but rather an interconnected whole that can envision true change.

The pandemic shed light upon many systemic problems of our contemporary society that went largely unnoticed and unaddressed in the last past decades. Similarly to the breakdown of the healthcare system due to the overflow of patients, another breakdown manifested itself in 2020, that of the legitimacy of the informational system. In his article, Cristian PRALEA analyses from a philosophical and critical standpoint the social and political morphology of this informational breakdown by mapping its consequences and symptoms and the new challenges for democracy that arise due to them. Pralea then goes on to identify the crisis of

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, robert.g.elekes@gmail.com

² Transilvania University of Braşov, cpralea@gmail.com

humanities as one of the main catalysts of this *infodemia*, the erasing of the informed citizen from the essential equation of any democracy, the one that is to be found in the connection between free speech and free press.

Sudipto SANYAL follows through, with an unsettling account of India's response to this pandemic, turning the state of emergency into a state of normalcy. In this particular transformation, we find the state's expectation that people would understand it as almost a grassroots one, and the most worrying aspect is that they actually went along with it. The apathy of the vast majority combined with a surprising lack of social empathy made possible a state of affairs that, at least, can be described as problematic.

2020 brought with it one of the biggest challenges that education systems worldwide had to face in decades: the sudden and forced evolutionary jump from face-to-face teaching and learning to on-line teaching and learning. This educational turn highlighted problems like social inequality and lack of access to technology, but as Reima AL-JARF's study *Distance Learning and Undergraduate Saudi Students' Agency During the Covid-19 Pandemic* shows, it also brought with it a crisis of motivation among learners. Based on a survey of translation students and instructors, Al-Jarf pinpoints the main catalysts of this crisis and offers strategies on how to increase the agency and engagement of learners.

Kelly A. HUFF brings a different perspective on the educational system during and, eventually, after the pandemic. Based on her own experience working for a public school in the United States of America, she argues, and also provides concrete examples for the necessity of developing a place-based education that would foster empathy and a holistic approach to knowledge.

On a different note, Stanca MĂDA and Mădălina GOMOESCU, bring a comparison between how people reacted to the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic through the use of humor, and how they used humor during the contemporary Covid-19 pandemic. They find out that the century that passed between the two pandemics has not changed much in terms of humor as a coping mechanism (and some of the cartoons they use really display eerie similarities), however, they also find that "quarantine humor" can actually be difficult to "get" without a prior lived experience.

Solidarity, the care and attention towards our fellow citizens was one of the key ideas of 2020, one that shaped our fight against a deadly virus. In her paper Delia OPREA studies the way companies exploited this key idea in order to promote their brand and products. By analyzing the social distancing visuals that transformed brand logos during the pandemic she brings to light the way companies adapt themselves to social change and enact this very change in their brand communication.

We decided to finalize this issue with a review of Slavoj Žižek's book *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World*, an interesting, but also impressive achievement, given that it was published in March 2020, when the pandemic was still in its infancy.