



Triadic Dimensionalities: Knowledge, Movement, and Cultural Discourse—in the Wake of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Sarah Marusek¹ · Anne Wagner²

Accepted: 11 March 2022 / Published online: 19 April 2022
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2022

Abstract

Since early 2020, the Covid-19 (CoronaVirus Disease-19) pandemic has affected our world in multiple ways. What we know and how we know it has shifted on a global scale. How we move throughout the world has been restricted and locked down. How we see one another has changed the cultural narrative in numerous countries throughout the world. As we seek to rid ourselves of the novel coronavirus infecting our everyday, three significant paradigm shifts have mutated our realities and imaginaries in which we dwell. With millions dead or sickened by the evolving Covid-19 virus (According to the World Health Organization, “Globally, as of 8:32 pm CET, 9 February 2022, there have been 399,600,607 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 5,757,562 deaths, reported to WHO. As of 7 February 2022, a total of 10,095,615,243 vaccine doses have been administered.” Source: <https://covid19.who.int>; Accessed Feb 9, 2022.), we are a different world now than we were. As guest editors for this Special Issue, *(In)Visible Mutations of the (Mis)Information Imaginary: Knowledge, Movement, and Cultural Discourse in the Wake of Covid-19*, we pay tribute to the millions affected by these changes by offering this collection of scholarship as a critical path forward. We examine three primary areas in which life, law, and legality have mutated with results that demand our immediate attention. The first section of contributing articles, *Knowledge*, engages with the dissemination of knowledge and (mis)information as either fact or fiction in lexicons and media outlets throughout the world. The second section, *Movement*, focuses on aspects of motion and its restriction in terms of bodies, legislation, access, and the threat of viral contamination across borders and within communities. The third section, *Cultural Discourse*, considers the (in)visibility of viral spread ranging from masks that cover the face to the separation of bodies through social distancing to the politicization of religion and vaccination. What once were normative cultural positionalities of space and politics have been volatized by institutionalized risk reduction and the confrontation of the unknown in the tenuous unforeseeable realm we now globally inhabit: L’idée se fait jour qu’il s’agit au moins autant d’une syndémie que d’une pandémie. Alors que la pandémie est une épidémie qui touche une

partie importante de la population mondiale, une syndémie caractérise un entrelacement de maladie, de facteurs biologiques et environnementaux qui, par leur synergie, aggravent les conséquences de ces maladies sur la population. Ost F (De quoi le Covid est-il le nom ? Académie Royale de Belgique, Bruxelles, 2021, p. 6). We hope that this Special Issue helps to contribute as a vital source of critical engagement with the effects of the new pandemic lexicon and re-emerging, yet irrevocably mutated public and private spaces and relationships to each another.

Keywords Covid-19 · Law · Semiotics · Imaginary · Knowledge · Movement · Cultural discourse

Objects and bodies do not offer themselves to the external environment as they are, and following a random, spontaneous disposition in space and time, but with the idea that such exposure should not be immediate but mediated, filtered by cultural rules and even material devices working as masks or veils, changing the identity of objects before their encounter with the external world or channelling them through a multi-sensorial system of ostentations and occultations, prohibitions and permissions of the gaze. [3, p. 52]

En quelques jours nous basculons dans un autre monde, balisé de nouveaux mots (maux): confinement, gestes barrières, distanciation sociale, télétravail. L'autre—nos proches, nos enfants, nos amis—devient un danger potentiel, un risque pathogène, notre école, notre bureau, nos lieux de rencontres, suspectés d'être des clusters potentiels [5, p. 1]

1 Part I: Knowledge

Knowledge is the dissemination of information; yet, information itself can often instead be construed as *misinformation*. How we come to knowledge can be in a variety of forms ranging from conversation to the internet to newspapers. The publication of knowledge may produce a mutated imaginary, in terms of how we see ourselves and our current state. The relationship between knowledge and truth evolves and grows even as it stagnates in mired decay. In considering knowledge and truth as the limbs of a tree, we consider the “arborification of multiplicities” as described by Deleuze and Guattari to include the root of fake news within the larger picture:

the stems of the rhizome are always taking leave of the trees, the masses and flows are constantly escaping, inventing connections that jump from tree to tree and uproot them: a whole smoothing of space, which in turn reacts back upon striated space. [1, p. 506]

The tree of knowledge, truth, and mistruth (as fake news) is sustained through its continuous fertilization from ideas and practices that sustain both fiction and fact challenged through the complex dimensionality of a smooth, yet striated globalized

media. The newspaper, as a source of publication, can contribute to ‘fake news’ within the scope of distrust of facts or the pronouncement of fiction, depending on the subject and the audience. Fact versus fiction is the topic of Rostam J. Neuwirth’s article, **The Global Regulation of “Fake News” in the Time of Oxymora: Facts and Fictions about the Covid-19 Pandemic as Coincidences or Predictive Programming?** Neuwirth describes “the power of legal fictions [as] another reminder for the importance of the imaginary in the real world [and] as an important element in the consideration that the grammar of most languages and binary logic alone cannot do justice to the immense complexity of reality and of life”. The pandemic lexicon that frames knowledge and positions information is lexicologically diverse across different languages, yet similar in expression, as Judith Rosenhouse shows in **Legilinguistic Features of a Semantic Field: COVID-19 in Written News/Media in Hebrew and Arabic**. The newspaper is a site of politics in which the implications of the lexicons create further struggles for power and control, as Ali Haif Abbas argues in **Politicizing the Pandemic: A Schemata Analysis of COVID-19 News in Two Selected Newspapers**. As a medium for knowledge origination and dissemination, the newspaper can be used as a platform for public awareness, as the public citizen can and should counter voices of authority that seek influence over the message [See also 4]. María Ángeles Orts and Chelo Vargas-Sierra beckon us to the implications of controlling the narrative in their article, **Warning, or Manipulating in Pandemic Times? A Critical and Contrastive Analysis of Official Discourse Through the English and Spanish News**. It is the pervasiveness of the message that generates aspects of the narrative that themselves are up for further analysis, as Paula Trzaskawka and Joanna Kic-Drgas reveal in **Penetration of COVID-19 Related Terminology into Legal, Medical, and Journalistic Discourses**. Furthermore, as the message turns to dogmatically forced uniformity, knowledge itself becomes a tool to implement all or nothing policies and practices, as Mirosław Michał Sadowski asserts in **Hong Kong, the Virus and Illiberalism: Between Flattening the Curve and an Authoritarian Slide?**

2 Part II: Movement

Whether through imposed lockdowns in various countries throughout the world or the restriction of migration across viruses, movement as a function of modernity came to a halt. Government lockdowns were attempts to stop the movement of people and concurrently, the movement of the virus. The invisibility of the viral threat from Covid-19 through the air perpetuated atmospheric changes to the air we breathe and the spaces we travel through. In considering such movement, we focus on the (re)development of such movement as described by John Urry as.

involv[ing] experiencing or anticipating in one’s imagination the ‘authentic atmosphere’ of another place of places [insofar as the] re-creating the nature of a place’s atmosphere and its appeal or repulsion to imaginative travel necessari-

tates the use of multiple qualitative methods including especially literary, artistic, and imaginative research. [7, p. 41]

The multiplicity of approaches in analyzing the atmospheric engendering of space and time as attributed to the global spread of Covid-19 are rich in experienced realities. Manwendra K. Tiwari and Swati Singh Parmar write in **Of Semiotics, the Marginalised and Laws During the Lockdown in India**, the March 2020 lockdown in India resulted in the deaths of many trying to return home and exposed the “hollow claims of equality before the law and the equal protection of laws as a constitutional promise to every citizen”. Citizens and the territories they inhabit have become the site of conflict amidst policies of exclusion. With travel bans throughout the European Union, territory itself has become factionalized, as Anna Doliwa-Klepcka and Mieczysława Zdanowicz argue in **The European Union Current Asylum Policy: Selected Problems in the Shadow of COVID-19**. The territorialization of capital across the bio-economic spectrum is the focus of Mark Featherstone’s article, **Viral Law: From Freud through Derrida to Baudrillard and Beyond**. Just as movement was curbed and targeted as the source of transmission, Featherstone sees the machinery of global capital as a viral contaminant of law as social contract and “bedrock of human civilization”. It is the spread of laws that respond to movement of people and goods also mark the virulence of injustice in competing differentiations of legality, as argued by Katuska King and Philipp Altmann in **Between Justice and Money: How the Covid-19 Crisis was used to De-Differentiate Legality in Ecuador**. Representing the fervor of fear and emergency, law itself is impacted as a source of stability in terms of leasing contracts, as examined by Mohammed Ibrahim Abu El-Haija in **Coronavirus Legislation and Obligations of Lessee in Jordan: Some Preliminary Reflections/Considerations**. The ongoing emergency of Covid confronting law and access fundamentally changes the operationalization of access. In their article, **European Human Rights Dimension of the Online Access to Cultural Heritage in Times of the COVID-19 Outbreak**, Elżbieta Kuźelewska and Mariusz Tomaszuk discuss the impact of cultural spaces accessible through online entry and viewing. Virtual presence during the age of Covid invites critical questions regarding accessibility, openness, and engagement in public and private venues closed to bodies during the pandemic.

3 Part III: Cultural Discourse

The cultural discourse arising during the pandemic adopts the flavor of anonymity through the wearing of masks, but also includes masks the effervescent parameters of changed public space through social distancing parameters. These changes resulted in fundamental relationships as affected not only through the positionality of bodies but also the role that those bodies play in strategies to combat viral spread. In the illustrative framework of prison technologies, Michael Foucault considers the gravitas of a.

new ‘economy’ of power [in which] procedures that allowed the effects of power to circulate in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted, and ‘individualized’ throughout the entire social body. [2, p. 120]

Through the constraints of the body in spaces threatened by viral spread, the panoptic purveyances of daily life become apparent through the body as a site of law and politics in *Pandemica Panoptica: Biopolitical Management of Viral Spread in the Age of Covid-19* from Anne Wagner, Aleksandra Matulewska, and Sarah Marusek. Yet, the body has long been the source of tension involving varying belief systems. In a paradoxical play, Mario Ricca compares Covid face coverings to the recently banned Muslim Biqab in France in **Don’t Uncover that Face! Covid-19 Masks and the Niqab: Ironic Transfigurations of the ECtHR’s Intercultural Blindness**. Ricca crucially reminds us that “the pandemic has changed the proxemics of public spaces and the grammar of ‘living together’”. The cultural constructs that have mutated further includes how close we stand to each other in terms of social distancing guidelines intended to prevent the spread of viral droplets, as examined by Sarah Marusek, Anne Wagner, and Aleksandra Matulewska in **Stranger Danger: Social Distancing, the Bubble, and the War on Space in Times of Covid-19**. Whether through the visibility of the mask or the invisibility of infected breath, the cultural discourse of bodies as vectors of disease is a source of politicization in terms of vaccines and reaching regional and global thresholds of herd immunity, as Ali Haif Abbas writes in **Politicizing COVID-19 Vaccines in the Press: A Critical Discourse Analysis**. The public health crisis exacerbated by the spread of Covid-19 reaches all aspects of cultural discourse, including the role that religion, as a social institution, plays in vaccination rates, as Yulia Erokhina discusses in **Stereotyping of the Russian Orthodox Church in Fake News in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Semiotic and Legal Analysis**. However, even if we get sick and stay home, as many laws encourage many of us to do throughout the world, pandemic-related argumentation is presented in courts with litigation stemming from the far-reaching impacts of Covid legislative consequences, as Anna Piszcz argues in **COVID-19 Pandemic-Related Arguments in Polish Civil Litigation** (see also [6]). Science is based on a series of scientific discoveries that some consider to be controversial, while others regard them disproportionate and challenge them in court, as David Mazzi further elaborates in his article entitled “... not a substitute for facts”: **the Irish public discourse on Covid-19 at the intersection of legislation, fake news and judicial argumentation**.

4 The Triadic Dimension of Masked Covid Life

Our present-day society is a masked covid life, where masks are “device[s] of hybridity” [3, p. 42] of our times. Face masks intermingle in space and time as the pandemic gets involved. Masks are transformed from protective devices into symbols of protest and/or artistic expression.



The surgical face mask has become a symbol of our times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/style/face-mask-coronavirus.html>, Accessed on 10 March 2022.)



In 2020, masks aren't just for protection (<https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/10/world/coronavirus-face-masks-statement-trnd/index.html>, accessed on 10 March 2022.)

Masks were originally conceived for people's protection to avoid being contaminated. Now, they can become symbols of protest, of political statements and belonging to a nation. These face masks move "beyond the convenience of social order" [3, p. 45], question the authorities. They are symbols of tyranny to many ends,¹ wherein the air is controlled by the authorities² and the people are denied freedom of choice.³ However, face masks are visual means of artistic expression, they are fashionable accessories.⁴ Like emojis, masks state emotions too:

Face masks exhibit the dissemination of new genres of cultural representations to the world, swapping people's mouths, using artists' imaginary and fantasy to sublimate

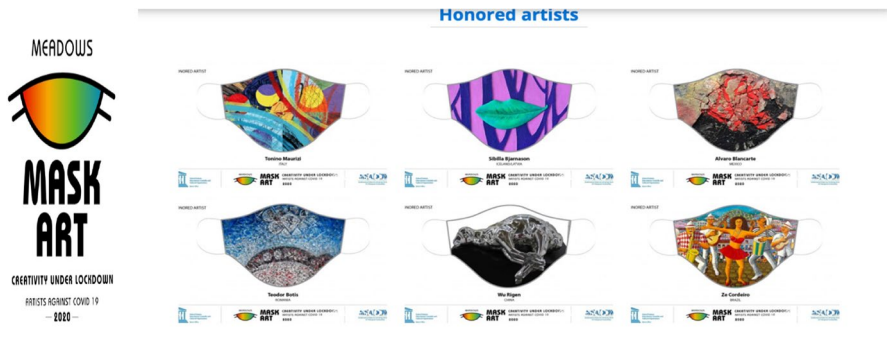
¹ <https://www.gq.com/story/arizona-republican-face-mask>, Accessed on 10 March 2022.

² <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/world/2020/06/02/thousands-chant-039i-can039t-breathe039-at-amsterdam-rally-angry-at-george-floyd039s-death>, accessed on 10 March 2022.

³ <https://eu.stevenspointjournal.com/story/news/education/2021/06/08/stevens-point-schools-facing-open-meeting-law-violation-investigation-portage-county-district-attorn/7590059002/>, Accessed on 10 March 2022.

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-51672753>—Paris Fashion Week: Facemasks on show amid coronavirus concern. Accessed on 10 March 2022.

the faces of others, and not only their bodies. A specific event, the Mask Art—Creativity under Lockdown⁵ organized in 2020 under the patronage of Unesco, showed the intertwined cultural dialogue, creativity and diversity among 250 artists worldwide.



So, as we move through the many variants and continuing aftermath of Covid-19, we also move through the many varied effects the pandemic has had on our way of living and negotiating power, authority, and each other. As the imaginary is constantly evolving, so too is our vision of where law stands in the face of pandemic-related processes, restrictions, and cultural impacts on normal, pre-and post-covid everyday life, wherever that might be and whatever that might look like. Yet, we are reminded that the ‘new normal’ must itself be prodded and critiqued before its novelty becomes hegemonic in controlling these and other facets of our lives.

We wish to sincerely thank the many authors who contributed their work to this Special Issue during this particularly challenging period of life impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Acknowledgement We wish to sincerely thank the many authors who contributed their work to this Special Issue during this particularly challenging period of life impacted by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

References

1. Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1987. *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
2. Foucault, Michel. 1994. *Power*. ed James D. Faubion. Robert Hurley and Others, trans.: New York, New Press.
3. Massimo, Leone. 2020. The semiotics of the medical face mask: East and west. *Signs and Media* 1: 40–70.
4. Niblock, Sarah. 2020. Towards a psychosemiotics of journalism, mental distress and Covid-19. *Social Semiotics*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2020.1779456>.
5. Ost, François. 2021. *De quoi le covid est-il le nom?* Académie Royale de Belgique: Bruxelles.
6. Pierron, Jean-Philippe. 2020. De quoi le covid-19 est-il le nom ? L'impact du langage sur la prise en charge et le positionnement éthique par temps de pandémie. *Éthique et Santé*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.etiqe.2020.05.003>.

⁵ <https://en.unesco.org/news/mask-art-creativity-under-lockdown-unesco-beirut-meadows-artists-against-covid-19>. Accessed on 10 March 2022.

7. Urry, John. 2007. *Mobilities*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Authors and Affiliations

Sarah Marusek¹  · Anne Wagner² 

✉ Sarah Marusek
marusek@hawaii.edu

Anne Wagner
valwagnerfr@yahoo.com

¹ University of Hawai'i Hilo, Hilo, HI, USA

² ULR 4487 - CRDP - Centre de Recherche Droits et Perspectives du Droit, University of Lille, 59000 Lille, France