

Literature, Language, Art in/and Higher Education in Times of Covid-19 in the Paniberian Context

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The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and the spreading of Covid-19 had and still has an extraordinary impact on the world population and has dramatically altered the lives of the planet's inhabitants. (Sohrabi, Alsafi, O'Neill *et al.*; Pengfei, Xiaosheng, Chao *et al.*). In the current circumstances, from the very beginning, the infection has shown an uncommon virulence and aggressiveness, has quickly diffused, and has become a global health issue (She, Jiang & Ye; Cheng & Shan). As a result, people had to face restrictions in their daily lives, social interactions, leisure activities and ways of working. As might be expected, the pandemic also had psychological implications and concerns, such as typical acute stress reactions, because it abruptly and unforeseeably generated sudden and widespread uncertainty, undermining the confidence in the personal and social sense of security. The negative psychological consequences of a pandemic, the subsequent quarantine and other actions to counter it are well known, due to their effects on subjective and collective psychological well-being. Nevertheless, this type of repercussion is less evident than others (Brooks, Webster, Smith *et al.*), and this is why psychological wellness is probably the most disregarded issue of the present situation (Schimmenti, Billieux & Starcevic, 41; Marazziti, 39-40). Indeed, on the psychological side, the current pandemic demands concern and interventions in various spheres of everyday life, such as supporting people in quarantine to cope with isolation, confinement and other limitations (Brooks, Webster, Smith *et al.*). The inevitable long-term psychological disorders and how to prevent them must also be taken into account (Xiang, Yang, Li *et al.*; Srivatsa & Stewart; Marazziti & Stahl) as well as the psychologically negative consequences of the ensuing economic crisis (Marazziti, Avella, Mucci *et al.*).

The Coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have altered our perception of space and time. Whereas previously there was an outdoor space and an indoor space, during quarantine the circumstances changed, and the individual found himself living in a single space, i.e. the place where he spent the confinement. The difference between the concept and perception of a public and external space (professional, leisure, etc.) and a private and internal space (personal, recreational, etc.) has therefore vanished. Similarly, the temporal dimension has also been altered: whereas before there was a public-professional time and a private-free time, then, in the single place in which the individual was isolated, public and private time also coexisted and finally merged and overlapped. Therefore, in the scenario engendered by the pandemic and the lockdown, life ran in the mono-time within the mono-space in which one was confined. In such circumstances, the web represented the *window on the world* to accomplish any activity and meet any need, whether for work or leisure, public or private. Therefore, Internet, ICT and social networks have become the main communication channel and their use changed. This had two implications: on the one hand, it meant that every activity had to be adapted to the new situation, e.g. smart-working but also remote leisure activities; on the other hand, it revealed a powerful need to express and share the experience we were having.

In the academic field, all kinds of activities were moved online. For instance, there has been a move towards distance learning and, as far as possible, individual and group research and dissemination have been conducted through online activities. Whereas, the area of artistic creation has greatly manifested the compelling need to express the

overwhelming experience of pandemic and confinement, and this has generated an abundant and very appealing production.

This is the basis of the project Covid-19 LiTraPan – Literary Training via ICT for Higher Education Improvement, Behavioral Coaching and Discomfort Management during the Covid-19 Pandemic, designed and implemented since March 2020 by three Universities, namely the University of Turin, the University of Alicante and the University of California Santa Barbara, under the co-direction of three principal investigators: Veronica Orazi (UniTo), Vicent Martines (UA) and Antonio Cortijo Ocaña (UCSB).

Since the health emergency arose in Europe in the beginning of 2020, participants have adapted their teaching and research/dissemination activities to the circumstances. To this purpose, they took benefit of ICT, an effective and strategic tool to foster Higher Education/research, behavioral coaching and discomfort management. In parallel, they started to investigate the literarisation of previous pandemics and the artistic creation mirroring individual and collective responses to the actual spread of Covid-19 disease, disseminated through the Internet and social networks.

During the first phase of the project, the collection of disciplinary materials based on the pandemic experience, published on the web during the emergency, was undertaken, in order to implement and feed corpora for disciplinary teaching, individual and group research, discomfort management and resilience building. The outcomes of the first phase of the project have been disseminated since May 2020 (Boccuti 2020; Greco 2020; Orazi 2020a; Orazi 2020b). The results of further research developments have been published or are currently in press (Cortijo & Martines; Boccuti 2022; Greco 2022a; Cortijo, Orazi & Martines; Darici; Greco 2022b; Orazi 2022a; Orazi 2022b; Orazi 2022c).

The contributions collected in this monograph resume the most recent outcomes of the ongoing investigation, in close cooperation with the project participants. Roig-Vila, Mengual-Andrés and Roda-Segarra highlight that, due to the pandemic, Higher Education has experienced significant changes, particularly the sudden shift from face-to-face to distance or hybrid teaching/learning. This situation has changed depending on the health conjuncture, but undoubtedly teaching was provided in a special environment, which also requires specific educational solutions. The authors expose the results of their bibliometric analysis of scientific research on Higher Education during the Covid-19 pandemic and stress the importance to point out that the scientific outputs on training processes in Higher Education during such a circumstance have increased. All this can be the basis for analysing the educational issues tackled and determining what a post-pandemic scenario should be in terms of Higher Education in the 21st century.

At the same time, as mentioned, during the first phase of the pandemic, the art sectors showed a strong impulse to express the experience that was being lived at global level. Thus, a rich array of interesting works appeared online, belonging to different genres (short story, poetry, theatre, comics, graphic novel, etc.). Among the most outstanding manifestations are the Spanish and Catalan microplays published online between March and May 2020. Orazi sets out the outcomes of the study conducted on these texts, used for her teaching courses and the discomfort management caused by the situation that was been experienced. She illustrates the results achieved through some key examples, in the framework of the project Covid-19 LiTraPan, pointing out that one of the aims of using these materials for Higher Education was to encourage students' personal creativity as a tool for processing their experience and strengthen resilience. This is what Scala offers, presenting a selection of original micro-monologues, that are the result of personal creation. Scala, a second level student at the University of Turin, who chose to devote her master's thesis to this topic, wrote these texts following the methodology developed by

Orazi and implemented through the analysis of the microplays she used during her Spanish Literature and Catalan Language and Literature courses at the Department of Foreign languages and literatures of the University of Turin in the a.a. 2020-2021 and 2021-2022.

However, the texts collected in the corpora also include material from other genres, such as fiction in its various expressions. So, Boccuti studies how during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, literature has been used both to find new frameworks of meaning and to document and bear witness to an extraordinary event and thus fix it in a collective and shared memory. She investigates the construction of this memory through chronicles and diaries produced in Latin America, concentrating in particular on those works which hybridise chronicle, diary and fiction, offering a strongly situated view. Darici, in turn, focuses on *Sherezade en el búnker*, a pandemic tale by Marta Sanz (2020). After illustrating Sanz's poetics linked to her commitment to gender issues and as a way of intervening in the world, she analyses the structure and content of the tale. This is followed by a reflection on the meanings of the text, highlighting the choice of the famous Scheherazade, protagonist and narrator of *The Thousand and One Nights*, to address the issue of gender violence during confinement.

The production of comic books and graphic novels also offers an evocative perspective. Among them David Ramírez's *COuviVIenDo 19 días* and Max's *Manifestamente anormal* stand out. Greco focuses on the former, an example of graphic pathography that narrates the illness of a family member and constitutes the cartoonist's second autobiographical work. She studies the relationship between this comic and the diaristic comic strip *Tal cual*, by the same autor, and demonstrates its belonging to the genre of graphic medicine through the analysis of the treatment of the temporal dimension and the narrator's perspective. Mininni, on the other hand, emphasizes that the health emergency arising from the Covid-19 pandemic immediately generated a linguistic emergency. In the complex process of adapting to a reality never experienced before, the language, dynamic and changing, has been enriched with technical terms, neologisms and popular coinages, giving rise to a *coronalengua*. This new language has been reflected in the Spanish comics that told the story of the quarantine in the spring of 2020, as David Ramírez's intimate diary *COuviVIenDo 19 días* and Max's angry pamphlet *Manifestamente anormal* demonstrate from opposite points of view.

Vacalebri also studies the effects of the pandemic experience on language, but from another perspective. She uses the cognitive metaphor theory (Johnson & Lakoff) in order to understand how individuals and society perceived and framed a subjective and collective trauma as Covid-19 pandemic. Through the analysis of the main metaphors used in Catalan language to refer to different concepts linked to the pandemic, according to significant examples from headlines and visual documents from Catalan medias, she identifies and defines the most used terms and reflects on their effects on society.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the plastic and figurative arts have also produced extremely interesting examples of elaboration and expression of the pandemic experience. Ciotta studies the works of Street Art created in Spain and Portugal in 2020. She highlights that Street Art has been one of the artistic expressions which has best interpreted the anxieties and feelings encountered at that time. This is because of the specificity of the topics covered, the realism of images and its diffusion at a global level also through the web and social networks.

When reflecting on the current pandemic, some evidence must be accepted: there is no doubt that this experience constituted a subjective and collective trauma, the processing of which is at an early stage. In order to deal with it, it is necessary to acquire awareness and begin to process it in order to progressively overcome it, both on an

individual and societal level. It is undeniable that we are still at the beginning of this process; however, the use of material that constitute the artistic-literary representation of this phenomenon is strategic: indeed, this is a tool that can support the progressive elaboration of trauma and the construction and consolidation of resilience, both from the point of view of the individual and of society as a whole. This monograph aims to contribute to this objective by defining and spreading useful practices, methodologies and materials to achieve it.

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