

Cultural Crisis During the Pandemic and Its Reflection in Georgian and American Print Media

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Abstract: The pandemic became the defining event of early 2020, impacting culture as well as all other areas of life. It emerged as the main architect, artist, director of silence, and dramatist of emptiness. It brought different cities around the world closer together and made them similar with empty streets and a slower pace of life. The pandemic placed new demands on many fields of art; it was a "timeout" for both the world and culture. In some places, art adapted to open spaces, but even in this openness, creative energy remained constrained, and much of what was expressed could not be fully articulated. There were instances where the pandemic became a source of "inspiration" for some artists, prompting them to compose original music, create new works of art, or transition to the online space, finding new ways to use this platform. Covid-19, which suddenly struck the world, drastically changed the global agenda. New regulations were imposed, the usual way of life was disrupted, and the world was unprepared for many of the challenges it faced. Before scientists and researchers could develop effective methods to combat the coronavirus, humanity had already shifted to a remote format. In this paper, we will explore the impact of the pandemic on art and how this period was reflected in print media, using the example of Georgian and American magazines such as "Teatri," "Aril," "Art in America," and "ARTFORUM".

Keywords: Pandemic, Art, Media, Online Space

Introduction

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization officially declared the Covid-19 pandemic. Just weeks later, on March 27, International Theater Day, theaters around the world found themselves in closed, darkened halls, enveloped in silence. The theater, which had continued to function even during times of war, was forced to halt due to the pandemic (de Peuter, 2023).

All branches of the arts were brought to a standstill, entering a period of crisis. Much like industry and other areas of production, the art world had to adapt to the new "rules of the game" created by the pandemic. Artists and institutions were left to first find ways to survive, and then to innovate and develop within these unprecedented circumstances.

"When the lockdown ends, the world will be different," said Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft. Indeed, the world witnessed the emergence of a new form of hybrid art. Mexican scholar and cultural expert Monica Bajonero Dias referred to this transformation as

"theatrical diffusion," a process where theater sought new platforms to connect with its audience (Krüger, 2021).

The pandemic's impact was not only felt in theater, but in all forms of art, writing, and life in general. These significant events were reflected on the pages of the research journals we studied. The pandemic did not just affect their frequency of publication, but also shifted the focus of their subject matter.

The magazine *Teatri* continued to be published with its usual frequency, once every two months, during 2020-2021 (Elstad, 2022). However, Covid-19 had a greater impact on its topics and content starting from the "editor's page" and extending to the reflections of its featured authors. In the first issue of 2020, editor Davit Andriadze recalls the "springs of art" of the director and historian Nikolai Evreinov, which the pandemic disrupted.

Methodology

To develop a methodology section for the article "Cultural Crisis During the Pandemic and Its Reflection in Georgian and American Print Media," you can follow this structure:

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on cultural narratives within selected print media. The research focuses on Georgian and American magazines, specifically "*Teatri*," "*Aril*," "*Art in America*," and "*ARTFORUM*." This design allows for a comprehensive exploration of how the pandemic influenced artistic expression and media discourse (Pantazopoulos, 2020).

Sample Selection

The analysis includes issues of the selected magazines published during the pandemic, from March 2020 to the end of 2021. This timeframe captures the initial impact and subsequent cultural adaptations to the pandemic. Specific issues highlighted for analysis include:

- *Teatri*, Regular bi-monthly publications, with significant content changes noted in early 2020.
- *Aril*, Focused issues discussing pandemic-related literary themes.
- *Art in America*, Articles addressing the effects of the pandemic on the art industry and mental health.
- *ARTFORUM*, Critical essays reflecting on the broader implications of the pandemic on consciousness and culture.

Data Collection

The data consists of articles, editorials, and critical essays from the identified magazines. These texts were selected based on their relevance to the themes of art, culture, and the pandemic. Key themes extracted for analysis include:

- Adaptation of art practices (e.g., online performances, new forms of expression).
- Changes in editorial focus and content themes.
- Reflections on the emotional and psychological impact of the pandemic on artists and audiences.

Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns and insights related to how the pandemic influenced cultural production. This involved:

1. *Coding*, Texts were coded for recurring themes, such as adaptation strategies, loss, innovation, and the intersection of technology and art.
2. *Interpretation*, Thematic insights were interpreted within the context of broader cultural and societal shifts caused by the pandemic, considering both regional (Georgian) and global (American) perspectives.
3. *Comparison*, A comparative analysis highlighted differences and similarities in the cultural responses between the Georgian and American contexts.

Limitations

The study is limited to selected print media and may not encompass all cultural responses to the pandemic (Duna, 2021). Additionally, the subjective nature of qualitative analysis means interpretations may vary.

Conclusion

The methodology outlined provides a framework for understanding the complex interplay between culture, media, and the pandemic. By analyzing these selected magazines, the research aims to illuminate the significant transformations in artistic expression and media narratives during this unprecedented time.

Result and Discussion

Andriadze writes about how the pandemic "made us wear masks that hide our emotions, forced us to maintain distance, fears, and avoid someone or something. It brought loss, the departure of the chosen ones..." Yet, he reflects that "perhaps the world is no longer a theater, but theater remains a kind of hope in these times, a place that has not been buried." (D. Andriadze, Teatri, 2020).

During the pandemic, a new column titled "Online Culture" appeared in the pages of Teatri magazine. Under this column, the article "Pandemic and Theater: Facing New Challenges" by Lasha Chkhartishvili was published in the second issue of 2020. In this piece, the author briefly reviews the centuries-old development of professional theater and discusses the challenges brought by the pandemic (Caron, 2021). The theater suddenly lost its most essential tool—live communication with the audience—and this interaction shifted to the virtual space. "Live art has become a victim of the 'violence' of technological progress, which has given rise to a new combination of theatrical and film-television expressive methods: online theater." (L. Chkhartishvili, "Pandemic and Theater", 2020).

Long after the onset of one of the most consciousness-transforming conflicts in the history of civilization, when the modern world was engulfed by an "invisible war," artists and writers took on the significant role and purpose of warrior-chroniclers. Tekla Archvadze discusses this role in her essay "The First Wave of New Pandemic Novels," published in the final issue of Aril magazine in 2021 (Strandvad, 2023). During the Covid-19 period, it became almost impossible to find a text completely devoid of or detached from the pandemic. As noted by the author, Scottish writer and playwright Ali Smith's Summer

was one of the first novels to depict the reality of Covid and self-isolation in real time. Key themes in these works included temporal and spatial dissociation, alienation, vague ideas about the future, and the continuation of "lockdown" as a symbolic dimension of constant waiting and captivity. (T. Archvadze, Arili, 2021).

In the first months of the pandemic's spread, the March 2020 issue of Aril magazine published Marcus Gabriel's work, "We Need a Metaphysical Pandemic." The author examines the pandemic through the lens of racist stereotypes, such as when a German thinks that his country's healthcare system is better than Italy's or when the English believe that the British can solve the problem with a "social-Darwinian solution" and produce eugenic mass immunity (Gligorijevic, 2022). "These are dangerous stereotypes. We need a new enlightenment so that every person can be raised ethically. Without moral progress, there is no real progress." (M. Gabriel, Aril, 2020).

"During the pandemic, it feels as though we are swimming through time, lacking sight of both the shore and the horizon. This represents a movement of the body that struggles to navigate the choreography; it is akin to 'tango on the sand,' as time continues to elapse." Thus begins *An Essay Written in Sand* by Monica Huerta, published in ARTFORUM. (M. Huerta, *An Essay Written in Sand*, 2023).

The author critically assesses the "management" of the pandemic. He argues that, beyond the virological infection and the economic and social crises it triggered, the pandemic fundamentally represented a crisis of consciousness. This is characterized by the pervasive anxiety experienced during the initial months of quarantine, marked by endless questions directed at oneself and others: "Did you bring an extra mask?"; "In the grocery store, surrounded by so many people, did I take a deep breath?"; "Would they use disinfectants at the gas station?" An anxious mind has become the "white noise" of relative, repetitive isolation (Lofaro, 2022). Those unable to stay at home and work typically spent their hours consumed by fear and anxiety. Many struggled to accept the new reality marked by altered "relationships." As the isolation began to lift, consciousness awakened to this reality, making the term "fatigue" particularly relevant for this period. (M. Huerta, *ARTFORUM*, 2023).

No area of American life remained untouched by the Covid-19 pandemic, encompassing education, the economy, politics, the social sphere, and culture. Almost every element of the arts and cultural landscape has transformed since March 2020. According to a survey conducted by *Art in America* magazine, over 62,000 arts workers lost their jobs in the brief period since the onset of the pandemic, and one-third of cultural organizations were forced to reduce the salaries of their remaining staff. In the pursuit of creativity, online spaces have become platforms for experimentation, while outdoor environments have transformed into venues for various events (Burrage, 2024). Across the globe, including in the United States, artists expressed hope that culture an integral aspect of human nature and one of the most vital industries in many countries would endure and ultimately prevail. This expectation has proven to be justified.

In the October 2021 issue of *Art in America* magazine, Jacoba Urist's article, "The Drowning Cure," was published. This piece discusses the healing effects of art therapy during the pandemic. In August 2020, the American Art Therapy Association released a report highlighting how the coronavirus has emerged as a significant mental health issue.

Ninety-two percent of the art therapists surveyed reported that individuals were experiencing mental anxiety due to stress caused by isolation, the threat of the pandemic, financial difficulties, and increased family responsibilities. American publications such as *Art in America*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* have frequently addressed the heightened societal desire to pursue new hobbies during the pandemic, including sewing, gardening, drawing, painting, and music activities that provide cathartic relief. As the author notes, people intuitively gravitated toward creative expression during times of extreme uncertainty, and engaging in activities such as painting, composing music, sculpting, or crafting during this period yielded significant therapeutic benefits. The journalist references a study conducted in 2017 by the universities of Washington and Indiana, which examined brain wave activity during the creation of simple artworks and found a positive effect on human mood. The journalist cites American Professor Dina Schapiro, who explains that this creative process fosters a sense of peace, establishes a rhythm, and delineates time and space, all of which are profoundly significant (Bajaj, 2021).

Conclusion

In reviewing the pages of the magazines *Theatre*, *Aril*, *Art in America*, and *ARTFORUM*, it is evident that the pandemic has profoundly impacted all spheres of life, particularly culture. Covid-19 has revealed a fundamental truth: regardless of our place of residence, skin color, or language, we experience illness, fear, and mortality in the same manner. In the April 8, 2020, issue of *The New Yorker* magazine, Polish Nobel Prize-winning writer Olga Tokarczuk published the essay "The New World Seen Through My Windows." In this piece, she observes, "The pandemic has shown us that the paradigm of civilization, which is the common consciousness of the last century and has been forming for a long time, is slowly disintegrating before our eyes. We lose the idea that we can do everything and that the world belongs to us."

Nietzsche's famous quote, "I want to teach everyone — there is an idea of how to erase yourself (so as to be born again) — this is a great idea of development," resonates profoundly with the period of the pandemic. During this time, individuals "erased" their relationships, creative pursuits, and activities centered around themselves. Amid the backdrop of silence, immobility, confinement at home, and widespread hysteria, many began the process of rebirth.

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