

Foreword

If you read history, you see that those horrible periods always pass. I think we must be in that transitional period where so many horrible things are happening, and then we will emerge on the other side.

Jonas Mekas

In today's world, crises have in many ways become part of our reality. We are participants in and witnesses to *permacrisis* as a time of protracted insecurity and instability. Besieged by constant challenges, we respond to complex political, social, and cultural issues, climate change, and today's current affairs. And indeed, the field of crises that surrounds us is endless: Some crises, such as the crisis of war and the dangers of survival, lead to religious, migratory, energy, food, and personal crises. On the other hand, crises are interconnected, affecting each other and our daily lives. The dominant image culture reflects complex realities: how to survive in the face of a crisis without losing one's values and critical reflection, how to apply existing experiences, and how to use effective methods of impact and action to address crises.

Drawing a distinction between a real (external) crisis and an internal one, understood as a reaction of our intellect and will to a potential (imminent) or actual (already existing) external crisis, and as a way of overcoming it, philosopher Naglis Kardelis draws attention to the importance of the interaction between will (as determination), intellect, particularly

critical thinking, and the interaction of will in the process of overcoming crises. Through an etymological and conceptual analysis of the word "crisis", he shows the connection between the nature of crisis, understood in the broadest sense, and the way in which critical thinking functions, thus revealing the different layers and facets of the crisis phenomenon. He stresses that every real crisis, whether potential (imminent) or actual (already occurring), has a positive side, since it mobilizes our will and intelligence, helping us to rise to the highest level of human achievement.

In a time of endless crises, survival scenarios focus on the ability to live and survive in spite of political upheaval, military actions, economic trials, social challenges, cultural value despair, and ecological cataclysms. An exploration by cultural scientist Rita Repšienė, entitled "Communicating Performativity and the Dilemma of Impact in the (De) construction of Crisis" discusses how the prevailing image culture, through the convergent power of media and the initiation of contemporary technologies, fortifies our worldview and provides positive inspiration in the face of crises. Impactful visual, verbal, and intellectual communi-

cations of power, such as presentations of nationhood, official speeches and public speaking, storytelling, and the rhetoric of ideas, have become an integral part of the realization of contemporary communication and creative industries.

Media researcher Daiva Siudikienė discusses Internet memes, an interesting phenomenon that is gaining ever greater importance in the light of various crises facing contemporary society. With the help of memes, media users express their reactions to complex events, to demonstrate public moods and attitudes towards global crises, and to disseminate ideas that help to mobilize particular groups in society, performing a kind of therapeutic effect, helping them to cope more easily with negative emotions. Memes created during the war in Ukraine have expressed the active civic stance of the creators, their determination to fight and not to surrender to hostile forces, which are represented through the use of metaphors, hyperboles, and other stylistic figures with a particularly negative connotation.

Sociologist Aida Savicka, who explores the change in the geopolitical self-awareness of the Lithuanian population in the face of security threats, stresses that self-awareness is a multidimensional phenomenon, encompassing various elements of local, national, and supranational identity. These various strands of geopolitical identity, influenced by very different factors, coexist in a complex combination. Devoting considerable attention to threats to community security, Savicka attempts to answer the complex questions of the present day, using data from the latest *Eurobarometer* surveys as the only longitudinal survey that provides annually updated data on trends in people's identification





with their local community, country, and Europe.

In his political anthropology etude titled “The People Take the Stage”, philosopher Arūnas Sverdiolas delves into a new phenomenon that has recently emerged in Lithuania’s socio-political life and which begs to be examined and reflected upon – mass protest demonstrations – and identifies two factors that are crucial to our socio-political life, which also form the basis of the protest demonstrations: the “games” or, as phenomenologists and hermeneuticians say, the *Spiel*, the game-play structure, which is characteristic of our political life; and an equally decisive factor in our political life – the fragmented, but also dispersed, amorphous state of society, its lack of structure and its powerlessness in building structures. And while these new phenomena do not change the fundamental competitive-managerial structure of our political life, a small minority of people still participate in protest demonstrations, while the vast majority remain outside the arena-stage as spectators or as passers-by, when mass protest demonstrations are considered as marking an important new phenomenon in the life of our society – the appearance of the people on the political stage, the question arises: “What next?”

As a retrospective on contemporary crisis, we present part of a conversation between art curator Hans Ulrich Obrist and scientist and inventor James Lovelock. At the request of French philosopher, anthropologist, and sociologist Bruno Latour, Obrist travelled to Dorset in 2015 to engage with Lovelock in the hope that he might share his theories. The conversation lasted nine hours. *Isolarii #8, Ever Gaia*, is the eighth edition of *Isolarii* and

focuses on the life of James Lovelock, environmentalist, futurist, and the creator of the Gaia theory, which proposes that the Earth functions as a self-regulating system. Lovelock died in 2022 at the age of 103. The publication of this conversation is intended to commemorate the recent deaths of Bruno Latour and James Lovelock. But there is nothing sentimental here: This publication is in fact a guide to overcoming “polycrisis” and maintaining, as Hans Ulrich writes, “the intuition of invention”. The conversation was published in the second book of the trilogy *The Archipelago Conversations*, published by *Isolarii* in 2023, and was kindly allowed to be shared with our readers.

We also present a conversation between Irena Vaišvilaitė – art historian, diplomat, and Lithuania’s ambassador to UNESCO in 2017–2019 – and cultural journalist Mindaugas Klusas about national inaction and the crisis situation in Lithuania. Lithuania has been a member of the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization for over 30 years. What has been achieved during this time? Is it true that “the world created by UNESCO does not exist for Lithuania?” In addition, the future of culture is discussed in the essay “On Colonel Stauffenberg and the Future of Russian Culture” by Russian writer Mikhail Shishkin, based on the 6th International Leonidas Donskis Conference “Will Russia Survive in 2024?”, held in Vilnius at the Vaidila Theatre on 21 September 2023.

The challenges of the Anthropocene that threaten the present day and which are perceived as systemic consequences of the functioning of capitalism that resist being broken down into potentially “curable” problems are discussed in the article “Challenges of the Anthropocene:

The *Pharmaka* of Integrated Capitalism Media” by philosopher and cultural critic Vytautas Rubavičius. Focusing on the established technical nature of the integral management of societies and their consciousness, which assures the full surveillance of social consciousness by means of the new media, the toxicity of man’s technical economic activity, which can only be “cured” by properly understanding it, is raised and discussed. In this context, the importance of understanding Bernard Stiegler’s *pharmakon* as a medicine that is also poisonous is also discussed.

Faced with a variety of technological tools and new possibilities for manipulation, the controversial “penetration” of the digital world into the human psyche is the subject of an article entitled “Disruptions in Visual Communication: On Vaguebooking”, in which Skaidra Trilupaitytė writes about disturbances in online communication (such as zoomer horror and zoomer humour), the digital “rebooting” of the deceased and the appropriation of the identity of “hacked” living people. Using the concepts of surveillance capitalism and dark media, and drawing on concrete examples from 2018–2022, this text demonstrates how, with the constant development of innovation, deception and even serious crimes through falsification and the creation of vague (semi)digital agents by artificial intelligence (AI) may pose more challenges over time.

Continuing on the theme of digital reality, we find ourselves among pandemic memes sanctioned by virtual mythicism, which, by “usurping” the most famous sacred works – Leonardo da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa* and *The Last Supper*, and Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam* – have transcribed pandemic content in a sarcastic

way to spread messages of altered reality. In an article by Rita Repšienė, memes as a virtual cultural construct and symbolic discourse localize creative capacities in an infinite space, inviting us to deconstruct value orientations towards the (self)satisfaction of humour. In the pandemic period, the need to communicate using stable, time-tested, and culturally grounded values as universally recognizable archetypes emerged, and thus iconic images became a superficial form of social sharing in the digital space (with no more meaningful content). Mythicality in a digitally networked society has opened up the possibility of expressing one's originality through mimesis, of forming a "new heritage" through mythical images, which, due to popular short-term dissemination, devalue creative thinking by ignoring authenticity and the sacred primordial, becoming a visual medium of immediate consumer gratification, and giving us the opportunity not to be carried away by irrational emotions.

In conclusion, we might want to enjoy this optimistic, anti-crisis inspiration from Jonas Mekas:

- *What keeps you going?*
- *This glass of wine keeps me going.*
- *What else besides wine?*
- *The whole history of human development. All the poets, all the saints, all the people that are in my library, that produce the best dreams of humanity. I'm part of it, and I cannot betray it. So, I have to be with them. I cannot be with the politicians. I am with the dreamers of humanity.**

* <https://www.villagevoice.com/im-like-the-last-leaf-of-a-big-tree-a-conversation-with-jonas-mekas/>