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INTRODUCTION

When I was invited to guest edit this special issue of *Studia Humanistyczne AGH: Contribution to Humanities*, Donald Trump had already been thrown off of Twitter, and the COVID-19 pandemic was already raging. Either topic and the challenges of freedom of expression and the damage of disinformation they raised would have been more than enough to serve as the focus of this special issue. By the time the articles for this issue began arriving, Russia had invaded Ukraine and Elon Musk was close to purchasing Twitter. They raise the same issues, through the lenses of truth and propaganda in social media in wartime and the role of big money in media evolution.

These issues are addressed head-on in my article, “The Explosive Growth of Social Media: Trump, COVID-19, the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, Elon Musk,” and they are either explicitly addressed in or in the backdrop of every other article in this special issue. Building upon Neil Postman’s *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, and its thesis that electronic broadcast media engender a Huxleyian *Brave New World* addicted to entertainment, William Merrin’s “*Bemusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Social Media*” argues that digital media usher in a Philip K. Dickian world in which individuals create and reside in their own informational realities. Harkening back to an Orwellian metaphor, Alexei Krivolap’s “Glassman Identity: From Big-Brother to COVID-Passport” explores the way social media for a variety of motives are eradicating private space and secrets in all levels of society. The transparent human has skin that can metaphorically be seen through. Agnieszka Stecko-Żukowska’s “The Poachers of Instagram – Tattoo Artists and Their Tactics in Social Media” looks at how makers of art that can actually be seen *on* the skin make use of social media, in a way that “prioritizes cooperation over competition between artists”. Urszula Jarecka and Paweł Fortuna delve into the code that makes social media tick in “Social Media in the Future: Under the Sign of Unicorn”. They report that AI is at present far from perfection and too “immature” to animate and effectively regulate social media, and they consider its prospects for the future. Monika Grzelka and Agnieszka Kula continue to examine the reality at hand and in “Quotation in Social Media: How Sharing Other People’s Words Could Increase Misinformation” find that the ancient and continuing practice of trying to be truthful via quotation could have just the reverse effect and contribute to the plague of misinformation in social media that besets our world. Finally, returning more literally to the plague, Denis Renó, Xabier Martínez-Rolán,

Teresa Piñeiro-Otero, and Andrea Versuti in a preliminary study “COVID-19 and Instagram: An Analysis of the Ibero-American Infodemic” gauge the amount of fake news in the torrent of information about the pandemic in social media.

The common denominator in all of these studies and articles is the speed with which social media have moved into a central position in our lives. This exponential growth and its disruptions of the past and present will no doubt continue, which means that this special issue of *AGH* would best be regarded as a snapshot of the state of social media and the world at the beginning of 2022. The contribution of these articles in the future would be as a marker of where social media and the world resided at this crucial moment in our history.