



**FULBRIGHT**  
Bulgaria

# **DIGITAL + / - PRESENCE**

Online Conference

**ABSTRACTS AND  
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES**

**Fulbright Bulgaria Online Conference  
November 20-21, 2020**

## KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS:

## Im/Possible Minds: New Approaches to Reading

What is the role of literary reading in the posthuman age of acceleration and distraction, marked by the rise of computational biology and humanoids in the context of human-driven evolution? The new methods for large-scale research – distant reading applied to big data – and the rise of machine learning in Artificial Intelligence both expand and challenge fixed reading practices, as well as staple views of literacy. The weakening of traditional modes of reading on paper, characterized by deep immersion and close attention to the text, is perceived as a move towards the cognitive impotence of homo sapiens facing the rise of the new “robo sapiens” (Stefan Herbrechter *Critical Posthumanism*, 13). Similarly, Maryanne Wolf warns of the “potential loss of our essential human qualities,” leading towards animality, or the “possibility of an enhanced intelligence” in the direction of transhumanity (*Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*, 157). The most significant goal of reading research in this context is to establish what specific training and what strategies of reading need to be employed in order to foster “the bi-literate brain”: one equally conversant in both digital tabular reading and long-form deep reading (M. Wolf *Reader, Come Home*). For this purpose, I argue for analyzing, through distant reading methodology, datasets of readers’ contributions on social platforms for writing. As social platforms tend to activate collective reading, which can involve collaborative meaning-making and critical evaluation of fiction, studying what is published on these platforms can provide answers to the question posited here.

**Assoc. Prof. Dr. Alexandra Glavanakova,**  
**Sofia University**



Alexandra K. Glavanakova, PhD, is associate professor in American Literature and Culture and Head of the Department of English and American Studies at St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, Bulgaria. Her teaching, academic research and publications focus on the culture and literature of the USA; transcultural studies and identity (USA and Bulgaria); the major cultural shifts in

literacy, education, and literary studies under the impact of digital technology. She is the author of two monographs: *Posthuman Transformations: Bodies and Texts in Cyberspace* (2014) and *Transcultural Imaginings. Translating the Other, Translating the Self in Narratives about Migration and Terrorism* (2016); the editor et al. of *New Paradigms in English Studies. Language, Linguistics, Literature and Culture in Higher Education* (2017) and *Swiftian Inspirations: The Legacy of Jonathan Swift from the Enlightenment to the Age of Post-Truth* (2020).

## Presence and Absence during a Half-century of Bulgarian Music Study

Living life apart from the physical co-presence of family, friends, and colleagues for the past eight months, coupled with my 75th birthday this year and the recent anniversary of fifty years since my first visit to Bulgaria in 1969, have led me to think about the experience of digital presence and physical absence as analogous to presences and absences that impact all of us who work and live between Bulgaria and the United States. The making of music and research on music making would seem to require deep and extended personal and physical engagement with others, and yet this presentation will focus on the productive absences that have fueled some of my insights and that have inspired some Bulgarian musicians to continue to make music while absent from their homeland.

**Prof. Dr. Timothy Rice,**  
**University of California in Los Angeles**



Timothy Rice, Distinguished Professor, Emeritus, of ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), did his doctoral research on the traditional music of Bulgaria with a Fulbright-Hays grant in 1972-73. He is the author of *May It Fill Your Soul: Experiencing Bulgarian Music* (University of Chicago Press, 1994) and *Music in Bulgaria: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2004). He also writes

about theory and method in ethnomusicology, including *Ethnomusicology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2014) and *Modeling Ethnomusicology* (Oxford University Press, 2017). He was founding co-editor of the ten-volume

*Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*; the editor of the journal *Ethnomusicology* (1981-1984); the President of the Society for Ethnomusicology (2003-2005); the Executive Board of the International Council for Traditional Music (2007-20013); and the director of The UCLA Herb Alpert School of Music from 2007 to 2013.

## INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF DIGITALIZATION

### Artificial Intelligence: Law, Society & Ethics

The growth of AI is everywhere in the news. It is now being applied to different transactional areas and is impacting most areas of private law. So far the legal and tech literature has failed to analyze the role of law and government regulation as they apply to AI applications in an increasingly number of areas of society, business, and law. Questions discussed include: (1) What are the benefits and pitfalls of the expanding use of AI? (2) What are the benefits and threats posed by the future development of 'superintelligence'? (3) What impact will AI have on the practice of law?

**Speaker: Prof. Dr. Larry Di Matteo,  
University of Florida**

Prof. Dr. Larry A. DiMatteo is a Huber Hurst Professor of Contract Law at the Warrington College of Business & Levin College of Law, University of Florida. J.D. Cornell Law; LLM Harvard Law; PhD Monash University. University of Florida's Teacher-Scholar of the Year; Editor-in-Chief, American Business Law Journal; Fulbright Professor 2012 & 2021, 150 publications & 14 books. Most recently, DiMatteo, et al, "Artificial Intelligence & Private Law" (2021); DiMatteo, et al, "Lawyering in the Digital Age: A Global Perspective" (Cambridge University Press 2021); DiMatteo, et al., "Smart Contracts, Blockchain Technology & Digital Platforms" (Cambridge University Press 2020); Visiting Professor at Universities of Münster; Bocconi; Catania; Leicester; Warsaw; City University Hong Kong; Sofia; Torino; Jagellonian; Bologna; and Mohyla Academy.

## Browsing National Parliaments in a Pandemic Situation

Report on the results from the first stage of a small CLARIN-ERIC project called ParlaMint that gathered, standardized, processed and made searchable the Parliament sessions in the COVID-19 period (Oct 2019 - July 2020) for 4 languages: Bulgarian, Croatian, Polish and Slovene. Also reference parliamentary corpora are available for these languages (2015-2019). The aim is to establish a digital strategy for handling parliamentary data and processing in times of any emergency (COVID-19 is just a showcase). Thus, any other reference corpora could be produced with parliamentary records from previous times with global crisis states, e.g. the great economic recession, periods of floods in Europe, the Ebola outbreak etc. Such structured data, now made available in concordancers and later – in ParlaMeter, are invaluable source for extracting the opinions and behaviour of MPs, government and parties in times of pandemic as well as the related trends.

***Speaker: Prof. Dr. Petya Osenova,  
Sofia University***

Prof. Petya Osenova, PhD is professor in Contemporary Bulgarian language in the Faculty of Slavic Studies at Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski" (morphology, syntax and corpus linguistics) and senior researcher in the area of Language Technologies in the Department of Linguistic Modelling and Knowledge Processing at the Institute of Information and Communication Technologies, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Her scientific interests are in the fields of formal and computational linguistics, language resources, machine translation. Petya Osenova was a key person in a number of EU projects, related to eLearning, Machine Translation, Language resources (EuroMatrixPlus, AsisKnown, LTFLL, QTLeap, EUCases, among others). She is the responsible person for the language resources in CLaDA-BG – the CLARIN and DARIAH joint framework in Bulgaria. Petya Osenova is the Bulgarian representative for User Involvement in CLARIN-ERIC. In 2018 Petya Osenova received the award of Clarivate Analytics for excellence in science research in South-Eastern Europe.

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## Digitalization Effects in Bulgarian Business Practices

The presentation highlights technological advancements in business practices in a specific Bulgarian context and displays selective role of the government (national programs, technological parks, regional/EU cooperation) in digital applications. It also emphasizes Bulgaria's weaknesses relative to other EU countries in ICT talent pool, advanced digital skills and digital applications. The author identifies key priority areas for the private sector (integration into management practices, adapting business models, investment in talent management and online training) and distinguishes a cluster of multinational and Bulgarian companies that integrate digitalization and ICT into management practices, namely into developing e-skills and training, effective teamwork and merging HRM into corporate-wide enterprise systems. The presenter reviews advanced practices at companies that may serve as attractive "role models" to domestic firms and offer positive experience for the other EU countries.

***Speaker: Prof. Dr. Mariya Bobina,  
Western Illinois University***

Mariya Bobina, Ph.D., is teaching at Western Illinois University and the University of Iowa (USA), and is studying business and management in emerging markets. She was named the Fulbright Scholar and conducted research supported by the Bulgarian-American Commission. Her scholarly publications on Bulgarian societal culture and business practices appeared in *Journal of East European Management Studies*, *Journal of Business Diversity*, *Bulgarian Studies*, *Business Posoki*; and she presented her findings to prestigious international forums such as Academy of Management Annual Meeting and at professional conferences in Bulgaria. Mariya Bobina is the Associate Member of the University of Chicago's Center for East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies and a Country Co-Investigator in 62-societies' Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research. She has conducted Bulgaria-tied research at Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars (Washington D.C.).

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## Losing Touch ... Gaining Focus in Virtual Education

The total disruption of traditional school systems this year will likely have lasting structural consequences. This presentation focuses on experiential observations of the potential impacts and positive elements of online learning encountered during Covid-19-imposed adaptations. It looks at remote instruction through the Fulbright framework of promoting international understanding and cultural exchange: It considers some strengths and limitations; how online schooling differs in the U.S. and Bulgaria; the role of personal relationships in learning; cultural gains and losses at a distance; and the adaptation of expectations to achieve optimal results. The presentation derives from a variety of lived experiences, including in-person, hybrid and remote instruction – both synchronous and asynchronous. It conveys the possibilities inherent in distance learning along with discoveries made through trial-and-error for use in future learning models.

***Speaker: Prue Salasky,  
Geo Milev English Language High School, Burgas***

Prue Salasky is a U.K. native who moved to the U.S. as a graduate student; she holds an M.A. in U.S. History from the College of William and Mary, Va., and an M.A. in Applied Linguistics, with dual tracks in Sociolinguistics and TESL, from Old Dominion University, Va. After careers in teaching and as a journalist, she combined her interests in language, instruction and communication to teach ESL to international students in the U.S. Last year, 2019/2020, she worked as a Fulbright ETA at Geo Milev, an English specialty high school in Burgas, Bulgaria. She is currently teaching Geo Milev students online from her home in Norfolk, Virginia, and also mentoring members of the school's debate team and editing its online newspaper.

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## COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY IN THE DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

### Myth Busting Inquiry-Based Online Learning

With the advent of Covid-19, online learning, too long the second-hand child of pedagogy, has emerged as the primary teaching mode for education for all levels of education. Today online/eLearning has become very commonplace and has open doors for learning for many and made it possible for many to continue their education. This presentation will discuss six myths about inquiry-based online learning. Examples will be provided on how to design and promote inquiry and delivery of an online course from a practical application. The presenter is currently teaching 100% online distance synchronous and online courses since 2015.

***Speaker: Prof. Dr. James Hollenbeck,  
Indiana University Southeast***

Dr. James Hollenbeck, Professor of Science Education at Indiana University Southeast, is the Coordinator of the Secondary Education Program, teaches "Science, Technology and Society for a Changing World", and "Secondary Science Teaching Methods". Dr. Hollenbeck earned his Ph. D at the University of Iowa. Dr. Hollenbeck is a past Fulbright Fellow Lecturer/Research at the Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski. In 2009, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" recognized of his work in science education and research in Bulgaria and awarded him the 120 Anniversary Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" Medal of Merit, Recognition in Outstanding Achievement in Research in Science Education. Hollenbeck received a second Fulbright to Canada as a Research Chair in 2015. In 2018, the Hoosier Science Teachers Association awarded Dr. Hollenbeck the Innovative College Science Teaching Award in recognition of the integration of Science, Technology and Society in the Science and Social Studies Education programs at Indiana University.

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## Presenting Online: How to Engage Listeners When You're Not in the Room

Virtual meetings and presentations have suddenly become the norm worldwide. But how do you keep listeners engaged when distractions are just a click away? In this brief introduction, I'll explain how to adapt your speaking style and presence to the online environment. You'll leave with practical tips you can use right away—whether you're teaching a class, giving a talk, or just trying to collaborate more effectively with teammates.

### ***Speaker: Jesse Scinto, Columbia University***

Jesse Scinto is a Fulbright Scholar (Bulgaria 2018) and Deputy Director of Columbia University's graduate Strategic Communication program. He's also the founder/CEO of Public Sphere, a leadership communication firm. Jesse has appeared on Bloomberg TV, and his work has been featured in Fast Company, Forbes and the Stanford Social Innovation Review.

## Communications, Communal Living, and the Real Path to Utopia

Both in collectivist communities and digital technology, American society has demonstrated a long history of interest in innovation and "cutting edge" transformation. The resultant experiences have been decidedly mixed in terms of success, but the potential remains for a transformation of social life that relies in part on digital technologies.

### ***Speaker: Dr. Jeffrey Folks, former Doshisha University, Japan***

Dr. Jeffrey Folks taught at universities in Europe, Asia, and the United States for more than thirty years. He is the author of many books and articles on American literature and culture.

## Virtual 'In' Sanity: COVID-19 and the Math behind Human Existence and Communication

Prior to COVID-19, the rhetoric of being 'human' was defined around activities conducted offline. 'Online' presence always came after our 'offline' presence, and philosophers and educators have espoused the mantra of logging off and spending time outside. COVID-19 suggests a huge paradigm shift to this definition of what it means to be human. Being human in an era that's bisected by modernity and a global pandemic requires both 'offline' AND 'online' presence. Online presence is not at the expense of offline presence anymore; rather, these two presences are now the twin poles of our existence. In my presentation, I hope to explore what this means in our social relations with other people, if there's a 'right' way of spending time, and the role of the virtual in maintaining our sanity.

***Speaker: Andrew Kim,  
Freelance Tutor***

I graduated from Amherst College in 2018 with majors in mathematics and history. Upon graduation, I worked at a software company as a business analyst for one year before embarking on my Fulbright to Bulgaria in August of 2019. In my spare time, I enjoy watching movies, playing basketball, and sleeping.

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## Communications in the Recovery Community

As a Fulbright, we accepted the responsibility to foster greater understanding among the world community as educational ambassadors. We do this by teaching, researching, exchanging of ideas, working together, and helping each other. Cross-cultural communication and understanding are one of our core responsibilities. As Fulbrights, we are also, spouses, parents, siblings, friends, colleagues, mentors and members of a community. We are people with the attendant messy lives - relationships, medical issues, financial concerns, children, meal preparation, clothes washing, car payments, and more, much more. I am a Fulbright. I am also a recovering alcoholic for 35 years. This presentation shares experiences in the recovery community during and after my Fulbright Awards. Rich experiences started seven years ago, continue today, and how the essential face to face recovery of alcoholics has been impacted by the COVID pandemic.

**Speaker: Anonymous\***

\*Members of AA, Alcoholic Anonymous, believe it is best not to reveal their personal identity in public or media settings. This is not to protect themselves, but rather should they fail to remain sober they have not provided a public spectacle of themselves while representing AA.

## TEACHING AND KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

**Effectiveness of Online Teaching in the Conditions of a Pandemic**

We discuss how online teaching can turn out to be an efficient tool to learning in the conditions of a pandemic. Key to success is the use of electronic platforms suitable for online teaching. Various platforms allow uploading a presentation prior to the class. Using drawing tools or other instruments makes the presentation vivid and attractive to the student. A variety of graphing tools can be applied including the use of a pen tablet. Additional documents can be uploaded and shared with the students using platforms such as Zoom, BigBlueButton, or Teams. Students learn more efficiently than in in-class, on-ground classes since a variety of visual aids and learning tools are used interactively. Recording lectures allows students to listen to the lecture multiple times. Online teaching is also more efficient than hybrid classes where online students are at a disadvantage, not being able to see or hear the professor.

**Speaker: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tamara Todorova,  
American University in Bulgaria**

Tamara Todorova is a full-time associate professor at the American University in Bulgaria. She holds a PhD in economics from Varna University and an MBA from Columbus State University. Her main teaching areas are Microeconomics, Mathematical Economics, Economics of Reform and Transition, and New Institutional Economics. In 2006 professor Todorova was a Fulbright fellow at the University of California at Berkeley where her faculty sponsor was Oliver Williamson. Her research interests are in the field of new institutional economics, the theory of the firm, transaction costs and transitional economics.

## Digital Humanities Approaches to Teaching Literature Online

The report examines the situation of distance education in an academic context and in particular the teaching of contemporary literature. In the process of this training and in the conditions of virtual “presence” in 2020 we had the opportunity to apply in the teaching of literature the approaches and tools of the digital humanities, which proved to be promising and effective.

***Speaker: Prof. Dr. Reneta Bozhankova,  
Sofia University***

Reneta Bozhankova is a Professor at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. She is the author of monographs “The Postmodern Russian Text” (2001), “Horizons of Digital Literature” (2013), “Digital Humanities and the Study of Literature” (2018), and of more than 90 articles on literature and culture of the 20th and 21st centuries. Reneta Bozhankova has participated in national and European educational and research projects, she has specialized in Oxford Internet Institute – University of Oxford, UK, University of Saarland, Germany, and the University of Kansas, USA (Fulbright – 2012).

## Stabilizing Underperforming Undergraduates in the Digital Classroom

Undergraduate students required to enter online learning environments bring with them all the strengths and challenges that they had in traditional classrooms. However, during mandatory online instruction in the COVID epidemic, evidence shows strong students tend to stay roughly in the same performance zone and may even excel, while weaker students may collapse entirely. Support systems designed for face-to-face instruction do create an adequate safety net. Just as courses need to be redesigned for online environments, so does academic supports for struggling students. Meanwhile, those new academic digital support systems in universities must be developed in such a way that women and ethnic minorities are not further burdened as the designated nurturers.

***Speaker: Prof. Ginny Whitehouse, Eastern Kentucky University***

Dr. Whitehouse served as a Fulbright Scholar at Sofia University in 2018, as well as guest lecturing at universities across Bulgaria. She has more than 25 years of academic leadership experience in both public and private higher education. She twice led the redesign of converged multimedia curriculum, headed university-wide restructuring of teaching evaluation, built faculty development and mentoring programs, co-directed the premier media ethics pedagogy training workshop for over a decade, edited the Cases and Commentaries sections of the Journal of Media Ethics, and has been repeatedly recognized for innovative teaching. She has extensive experience working with a range of diverse student populations: from first-generation university students out of urban centers and remote mountain communities to elite honors students to graduate students. She is continuing research concerning media privacy and digital impact on media organizations. She currently is proposing the development of an academic mentoring and coaching program for undergraduates struggling with digital learning.

**Teaching Ethnography and the Challenges of the Digital Age**

Ethnography as a research method is dependent on the physical world and our presence in it and it is an embodied experience, too. And while digital ethnography is a very potent approach to the fieldwork with its methodology and deontology developed much before the challenges of the global pandemic it is not the best way to start one's education in research techniques. How do we teach ethnography to our current students? Is it ethical to send them on the field while all our current communication is online? How could they safely conduct their research projects? Is the way we bodily sense our fieldwork changing? But also, what happens once all of the research we are doing is mediated through privately owned social platforms? Those are the questions that I am currently preoccupied with.

***Speaker: Dr. Velislava Petrova, Sofia University***

Velislava Petrova is an assistant professor at the Cultural Studies Department at Sofia University. After defending her PhD on urban marketplaces as sites of transformation in the post-socialist period, she continued working on urban space while gradually gaining more interest in the field of material culture (ranging

from food through waste). Her main fields are urban anthropology, economic ethnography and post-socialist transformations with their focal point being the contemporary forms of common living together in urban setting. During the last ten years Velislava was also actively working in promoting public social sciences through the organization of seminars, coorganized by the MA Program in Cultural Anthropology (Sofia University) and The Red House; and open lectures (Sofia University, New Bulgarian University and Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). In 2020, Velislava was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at ISEEEES, UC Berkeley with a research titled: Materialities of Dirt, Economies of Waste. Bringing Different Cultural Perspectives Together.

## THE NEW NORMAL: DIGITAL PRESENCE IN THE ARTS, STEM AND PHILOSOPHY

### **\*Tentative\* Audiences and Art Digitally – Opportunities and Challenges**

The presentation will focus on the preliminary results of the research on audiences and art in the digital environment in the project "Reconnect: Audiences and Cultural Content in the Digital Environment" supported by the National "Culture" Fund, Bulgaria. The project aims to investigate audience attitudes towards today's cultural offers in the digital environment. In partnership with organizations and creators working with theatre, music, performance art, cinema and visual art, it seeks to research a wider spectrum of views and the needs of the public in relation to diverse cultural offers. The preliminary results will focus on who is the current audience for art digitally and how it corresponds with trends of accessibility, democratization and community building.

#### ***Speaker: Milena Berbenkova, Intercultura Consult***

Milena is an audience analysis and development specialist. Currently working on a project researching audiences for arts in the digital environment, supported by the National "Culture" Fund, Bulgaria. She has worked on several audience research projects for cultural organizations in the fields of popular science, theatre and

music. Her experience includes work for non-profit performing arts organizations as well as for cultural enterprises and museums. She is a Fulbright graduate of the Arts Management MA program of Columbia College Chicago (2017).

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## Storytelling: From Live to Zoom in the Blink of an Eye

Storytelling, in person and face-to-face, is one of the oldest educational methods in the world. Live storytelling events aim to create a connection between storyteller, story and listener, whether the tales are personal, literary or folkloric. How can we retain this connection in the pandemic-inspired online world? How do listeners of varying ages respond to storytelling on Zoom? On March 16, American storyteller Priscilla Howe began offering storytime online for children every weekday. She thought she would do this for a month or two. Seven months later, she has a small and dedicated group of daily listeners from age three to ten. In this brief presentation, Howe discusses what does and does not work in these online sessions, including some unintended benefits of the daily Zoom calls.

### ***Speaker: Priscilla Howe, Storyteller***

Priscilla Howe travels the world (fourteen countries so far) with head full of stories and a bag full of puppets. Since 1993, her full-time job has been telling folktales, personal stories and literary tales to listeners of all ages, even grownups. She performs on Zoom, and when it isn't a pandemic, in schools, libraries, festivals, house concerts and literally her own backyard. Her live and online program Grimm for Grownups is listed on the Humanities Kansas Speakers Bureau. She is currently offering a Zoom storytime for children every weekday. Howe's collection of Bulgarian folktales gathered during a 2015 Fulbright Scholarship will be published in Autumn 2020.

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## Dissecting the World in Four Blogs

I dissect the outside world and carve out my own walled garden with my four blogs:

- 1) [CorporateNature.blogspot.com](http://CorporateNature.blogspot.com): Exploring the metaphorical parallels between nature and business.
- 2) [StartupRealities.blogspot.com](http://StartupRealities.blogspot.com): A startup fiction blog on novel entrepreneurial ideas presented as existing companies whose founder is

getting interviewed.

3) RepurposeEducation.blogspot.com: On universities and innovative approaches to management education.

4) BrexitMetaphors.blogspot.com: Devising new metaphors for Brexit.

Blogs are as much a messenger to diverse audiences in the digital world as they are an introspective exploration of one's own ideas: just like freshly washed laundry is hung out to dry, ideas need to be developed and exposed to external/peer review to mature. Ultimately, you always write for the others as well as for yourself. Metaphors are a particularly fertile (though somewhat niche) ground as the younger generation are a metaphorically-savvy audience, given the proliferation of internet memes, gifs and emoticons in the digital realm. Importantly, writing can also be fun: especially some of my startup fiction posts which are as much about genuine entrepreneurship as they are a spoof of the journalist interview genre.

***Speaker: Georgi Iliev,***  
***Association of MBAs***

Georgi Iliev is Strategic Projects & Innovation Director at the London-based Association of MBAs (AMBA). He works with 130 business schools in China, Japan, Europe, Russia and Latin America. Georgi has lived/studied in China, Hong Kong, the USA, Britain and Bulgaria and speaks Mandarin Chinese, Spanish and Russian. He did an MBA at Emory University, Atlanta, on a Fulbright scholarship (2008-2010) and was a Chevening Scholar at the London School of Economics. Before 2007, Georgi used to teach China Business at Sofia University. In his spare time, he writes blogs exploring metaphorical parallels between nature and business.

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## **How COVID Pandemic Accelerates the Modern Technology of Research and Education**

I will focus on my unique stay and experience in USA during the peak of pandemic - experience in the manner of life, the academic contacts and collaboration. I learned and mastered advanced technologies that after my coming back in BG I started to train my Bulgarian students. I think the world changed for a long time and all of us need to learn to live in a new way.

***Speaker: Prof. Dr. Michail Todorov,  
Technical University of Sofia***

I am Professor in Applied Mathematics in Faculty of Applied Mathematics and Computer Science, Technical University of Sofia. My research interests are in studying of complex and nonlinear Systems: the study of the mechanics of natural phenomena using advanced mathematical techniques and state-of-the-art computational simulations. My scientific activity I combine with intensive training of students, where I apply modern methods of education combining classical methods with digital remote technology.

## **Digital Presence – A Philosopher’s Perspective**

Philosophers are never fully present, not even in face-to-face interactions. Most of the time, they live – happily or not – in their mind palaces. Times of crisis tend to push them even more inwardly. As Sartre put it after France's liberation, "Never have we been as free as during the German occupation." Since action was limited during WWII, he had to resort to his inner resources. The current pandemic is forcing us to reflect along similar lines. While we have not chosen the social limitations imposed upon us, and resent them, we find the facility with which we can communicate with students and colleagues living thousands of miles away liberating, almost dizzying. Even the most conservative philosopher now has a digital footprint (Webinars, Zoom recordings, pre-recorded lectures). How is this different from the old-fashioned printed communication format? Philosophers may be "present" to their audiences despite geographic distances and far apart time zones while they are online, and yet once the recordings are posted, they are no more "present" than in the books and papers they publish. Or are they?

***Speaker: Prof. Dr. Tamara Albertini,  
University of Hawaii at Manoa***

Dr. Tamara Albertini is Chair and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. She has a Dr.phil. from Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich (Germany) and a Lic.phil. from the University of Basel (Switzerland). She specializes in Renaissance and Early Modern Philosophy, Islamic Philosophy, Contemporary Arab Philosophy and Feminist Issues in Philosophy. Within Islamic philosophy her work aims at reintroducing the vigor and vision of Muslim intellectual

contributions from the classical period. Her most recent publication is *Politics, Nature, and Society: The Actuality of North African Philosopher Ibn Khaldūn*. Special issue of *Philosophy East and West* 69, 3 (2019). Dr. Albertini's research on Renaissance philosophy focuses on Nicholas of Cusa (mathematics, cosmology), Marsilio Ficino (metaphysics, aesthetics) and Charles de Bovelles (sapientia, ars oppositorum). Professor Albertini has been awarded national and international grants. Most recently, she received a Fulbright Scholarship (2018/19, in Bulgaria) and a Distinguished Scholar Award from Cairo University (2019).

## OUR MUSICIANS

### Lilly Drumeva



Lilly Drumeva-O'Reilly is a Bulgarian singer, songwriter, journalist and music producer. She formed Bulgaria's most successful country and bluegrass band "Lilly of the West" in 1996, still active today. The group has performed in many European countries and the US, winning prestigious awards. Lilly has released ten albums and has organized numerous music events, concerts and

festivals. She is also a renowned radio and TV presenter, hosting music programs for the past 15 years (BBC, Balkan Bulgarian Television, Retro Radio, Radio Sofia). Lilly is also a Fulbright scholar and has studied music in Nashville. She is the author of the book "In The Mood With Lilly – 50 Music Themes", a music encyclopedia in Bulgarian language. Lilly has also built up a reputation as a successful music promoter, organizing tours for American and European artists. She is the director of the Sofia Singer Songwriter Fest, a 5-day festival, dedicated to acoustic folk music and poetry.

[lillydrumeva.net](http://lillydrumeva.net)

## John Thomas



John Thomas is a pianist, music director, concert producer, actor and composer. He embraces a "music without borders" perspective as one of the best ways to create broad cultural exchange and mutual understanding. John received a Fulbright grant in 2019-20 for research, study and performance in Bulgaria, where he was affiliated primarily with the Plovdiv Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts. His mentors included pianist Romeo Smilkov, conductor Vladimir Vladimirov, composers Svetoslav Karagenov and Milcho Vasilev, and ethnologist Zoya Mikova. He also studied with Georgi Petkov, a Latin Grammy award winner and conductor at New Bulgarian University. He was the first pianist from the United States to perform Vasilev's "Concertino" for piano and folk orchestra. In Provincetown on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, John has produced the *Great Music on Sundays @5* concert series for 22 years, the annual *Celebration of Life* concert since 1994 and the annual *WorldFest*, organized in 2011 to welcome students and workers from Europe and the Caribbean who are employed during the summer season; all of these events include Bulgarian music. John's recordings are available on iTunes, Amazon and CDBaby.

[johnwthomas.com](http://johnwthomas.com)

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[www.fulbright.bg](http://www.fulbright.bg)