Editorial

ISSUE 5. TRANSMEDIAL PRACTICES IN POST-COMMUNIST SPACES

The apex of media separation curiously coincided with the Cold War, a period when clear boundaries were established not only between ideological spaces but also between media platforms. Following the end of one-party states in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a discourse of the 'new' was established, becoming the dominant paradigm in the ensuing decade. This discourse took the form of various transition theories, studies into new identities and examinations of practices that negated previous experiences. With the arrival of new digital means of communication and their popular use, the field of scholarly exploration expanded to include zones of intersection between old and new media, past and present experiences, reflecting on strategies of re-use and recycling and the associated sense of nostalgia. Now that media convergence in post-communist states is a fact that is difficult to ignore, we seek to launch a discussion on how transmedial practices operate in the region and what political, social and cultural implications they have.

In proposing the current thematic issue, *Digital Icons* aims to investigate the issue of transmediality from the point of view of area studies and to place it at the intersection of a few other academic disciplines: sociology of digital culture, digital literary studies, political economy of new media, screen studies, fandom studies, and so forth. The issue presents a number of case studies, each of which, on the one hand, recognizes the media specificity of a phenomenon in question and, on the other, focuses on cross-media applications and practices. It seeks to expand theories of convergence, remediation, non-linear production and hypertextual creativity by concerning itself with the impact of transmedial practices on authorship, labour, branding and citizenship in multi-platform environments, synergizing with complex cross-promotional product marketing initiatives and the construction of citizen-spectators. The issue interrogates cultural memory as a transmedial locus by considering different media flows and modes of representation.

This issue of *Digital Icons* addresses a few questions, namely: How do practitioners and audiences assess the impact of 'new media' on 'traditional media' and vice versa? What is the role of transnational communities in exploiting and expanding the transmedial space? How do we conceptualize political and cultural boundaries in transmedial contexts? How does academic work reflect the arrival of transmedial practices as new ways of producing and disseminating knowledge? How do new market economies in post-communist states exploit transmedial labour?

The issue consists of three distinct sections. **The first section** includes four research papers, two explorative essays and a digital artwork. The contributions come from internet-practitioners and internet-theoreticians. James Aulich's article analyses the use of new media in the resistance to Slobodan Milošević's regime in Serbia in 1995-2000. Aulich combines elements of media analysis and media archaeology by focusing on the early use of the internet by the independent radio station B92 and the oppositional organisation Otpor. The article challenges the technological determinism of the Google Doctrine that suggests digital revolutions inevitably lead to liberal democracy; Aulich's stance is in tune with Evgeny Morozov's recent book entitled *The Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World*, which is also reviewed in this issue.

Michael Gorham in his article entitled *Virtual Rusophonia: Language Policy as 'Soft Power' in the New Media Age* contests the dominance of the structuralist approach to and debates over the analysis of the impact of the internet on the language norm. He encourages the reader to pay attention to a much larger and more complex context in which such debates occur, by investigating how the Russian government has used language and the internet as tools for 'soft power', i.e. educational and cultural means of promoting Russian national interests, both at home and abroad. In his article, Gorham conceptualises the Russian language as a multi-mode phenomenon and suggests that the 'Russian World Foundation' (Fond 'Russkii Mir') is a virtual projection of political interest of the Russian government at home and abroad.

Both Aulich and Gorham indirectly reconsider theories of nationhood as applied to virtual environments, an issue that Egor Panchenko puts forward in his *Convergence of Internet News Media and Social Networks on Runet: A New Public Sphere or a Space of Control?* In his article, Panchenko attempts to investigate a new media system that is apparent in Russia and that is grounded in the convergence of online news sites and social media. He explores the infrastructure of this system and its specific characteristics on Runet. He argues that, unlike users in other countries, Russian audiences remain passive and uninvolved in public debates about significant social issues.

While Panchenko notes political disinterest of Russian internet users, Elisa Coati identifies the internet as the main locus of creative activity of Russian authors. In her *Time and Space Games on Akunin's Virtual Pages*, she analyses how new technologies have had a significant impact on book culture, as exemplified by the work of Boris Akunin, one of Russia's most popular contemporary novelists. In her article, Coati provides a case study of two websites in which Akunin is prominent as an author and fan idol. She traces the experience of the reader as they engage with the complex temporal and spatial organization of Akunin's novels and websites.

While Coati concerns herself with aesthetic categories of media convergence, Henrike Schmidt considers the impact of new media on strategies of consumption as evidenced in the site of *LitRes*, which is a conglomerate of creative and business activities. In her essay, Schmidt positions her argument at the intersection of the various practices that the modern practice of reading involves, including downloading, sharing and commenting. She addresses this transmedial issue through the concept of piracy and free enterprise that underpins contemporary Russian culture.

Sudha Rajagopalan approaches the issue of transmedial engagement from the perspective of fans by looking at the Russian site Kino-teatr.ru, which aims to facilitate film-talk among a large community of cinema afficianados on Runet. In her essay Rajagopalan puts forward the notion of digital cinephelia, i.e. an experience facilitated by this site, where users find a space for downloading films, sharing movie-talk, contributing rumour, anecdote, fact and opinion, and creating and sustaining cinema/cultural memory.

The question of digital memory and transmedial creativity is at the heart of the artwork that concludes the first section of the current issue of *Digital Icons*. Roman Leibov's ringtone *Levinton* is a transmedial story of appropriation, loss and memory, conceived as a sound performance and utilised in everyday practices. As evident from his artistic statement, *Levinton* occupies a special place in his memory and is built into the discourse over literary tradition, oral performativity and significance of place.

The second section of the issue includes a set of reports and commentaries that provide an overview of developments in the field of new media studies and digital art practices. Four contributions in this section focus on academic conferences that took place in various countries of Europe in the past few months. From these contributions, it transpires that a) the issue of the language of new media and linguistic form, albeit having been formulated by Lev Manovich in 2001, remains a pertinent research issue for many scholars. Perhaps this is a residue of the structuralist approach to new media that seeks to (re-)consider notional boundaries of new media; b) there is a tendency to explore social and cultural phenomena in a trans-medial manner, paying attention to contexts and loci and expanding the theory of mediality and remediation; c) new media studies have expanded to include digital television and the practice of viewing television online. Therefore original studies are required to investigate this new transmedial environment that is even less static than the web of the 1990s as we remember it and thus requires a new methodology for the analysis of medial texts; and finally, d) digital performance has established itself as an ultimate transmedial practice, combining elements of different art forms and experiences. One cannot help noting that the Russian State University for the Humanities (RGGU), Moscow, has become the leading centre for new media studies in Russia as evidenced in the two events that took place at this institution in March and April 2011 (both are reviewed in this issue).

The book review section provides reviews of four books, namely, *The Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World*, by Evgeny Morozov, *From Poets to Padonki: Linguistic Authority and Norm Negotiation in Modern Russian Culture*, by Ingunn Lunde and Martin Paulsen (eds.), *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms*, by Gerard Goggin and Mark McLelland (eds) and *Internationalizing Media Studies*, by Daya Kishan Thussu (ed.). The choice of these publications for review was determined by the following considerations: a) the first book provides a critical examination of existing theories concerning internet and democracy; it is written by a specialist in the region that concerns *Digital Icons*; as the book is accessibly written and popular, it has a chance to have a great impact on how general users conceive of the internet; b) the second book addresses the issue of the linguistic form that has been under the influence of the internet, an issue that is explored in-depth in the article by Michael Gorham, also published in this issue of *Digital Icons*; and c) the review of the last two books concludes the issue by analysing the position of new media studies in two perspectives: in terms of the subject area, i.e. in relation to the

general theory of media, and in terms of the location of new media studies, i.e. as an extension of the post-colonial theory that questions the centrality of western discourse. The final review sets an agenda for an exploration of phenomena to be addressed in the following issues of *Digital Icons*.

The issue was prepared by Sudha Rajagopalan, Ellen Rutten, Natalia Sokolova, Henrike Schmidt and Vlad Strukov.

Vlad Strukov, Editor.