CfP special issue "Digital Selves Embodiment and Co-Presence in New Media Cultures in Central Europe and Eurasia"

13.07.2020
Empfohlen von Redakcja Pol-Int

Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media
Kulturwissenschaften, Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaften
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Digital Selves. Embodiment and Co-Presence in New Media Cultures in Central Europe and Eurasia

Guest editors:

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Since the emergence of new media cultures, the theorization of the relationship between embodied positioning in space and our digital personas has evolved in new and significant directions. We have become increasingly aware of the forms of extended, multiple and fragmented selves that are made possible by internet and computer-facilitated settings. New media have championed previously unthinkable practices of self-representation necessitating a change in how researchers understand the virtual traces of our bodies online and the relationship between material bodies and physical spaces.

As of recently, the global pandemic has shifted daily practices and forced many people to seek new, predominantly online, ways of socializing. However, even before this crisis, there were many digital ways of being apart together – developed in minority or marginalized communities. For instance, in mid-March 2020, Russian disability activists started a hashtag campaign, #ButWeAreAlwaysAtHome (#АМыВсегдаДома) seeking to mobilize popular conversations about 'surviving quarantine' to highlight ongoing social exclusion of people with disabilities and crip strategies for living at home.

This special issue studies the lived experience of digitally mediated environments, with a particular focus on the embodiment and material conditions that support digital sociality in Eurasia and Central Europe. While we take the dynamics of the pandemic as one possible source of inspiration, this issue welcomes the exploration of digital embodiment and togetherness more broadly. As guest editors, we orient this issue towards bringing together the Slavic Studies of online worlds and feminist and postcolonial cultural studies of the body. We are interested in how human bodyminds are shaped through and shape digital media, emplaced at once in material space and in virtual interfaces. We follow disability studies scholars in using the term bodymind to connote a
way of thinking body-and-mind sans cartesian dualism, and referring to how our human selves interact, socialize, live (Haraway 2004 [1985]; Price 2015; Schalk 2018). This line of inquiry follows the idea that "[t]he digital body is extended, enhanced, reconfigured and yet identifiable as a body of infinite variability and creativity, that is still linked with our everyday mode of "being" tied to our locatable and temporal existence' (Broadhurst and Price 2017, 2). We are interested in exploring the body online in the current moment and political possibilities that new media enable for 'our pixelated selves' (Hartblay 2019). Drawing on understandings of the self, social life, publics and social change developed in contemporary social theory, as well as feminist science studies' attention to the political stakes of the labour that facilitates online co-presence, this special issue takes a blended ethnographic and cultural studies approach, highlighting research and media expressions that document and theorize dynamics of social power at work in how we live now as digitally enabled, materially present selves.

Some possible questions that follow from this line of inquiry include:

How do emplaced and embodied users perform digital selves in Eurasia and Central Europe? What configurations of corporeality and new media enable the effect of co-presence? How do linguistic, national and cultural contexts in contemporary post-socialist Eastern and Southern Europe and Eurasia differentiate modalities and trends in digital corporeality? How have theoretical innovations in feminist, queer, critical race, postcolonial and disability studies presented new possibilities for imagining digital selves and understanding the corporeal internet? How have new media and digital technologies enabled new perspectives on embodied relations, or what the body / bodymind is? What new ways of gathering and being together on and offline are engendered by contemporary digital practices? What kinds of solidarity, liberatory practice and social possibilities emerge from new configurations? How do contemporary practices of embodied selfhood present new challenges to the metaphors that we use to understand social life – including inequality, inclusion/exclusion, democracy, liberalism, capitalism and so forth?

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- Embodiment on regional internets
- Techniques of digital sociality – from dating rituals to political organizing
- Embodiment and local cyberfeminisms
- Embodied labour in the creation, maintenance, and repair of digital networks
- The diversity of sensory and material modalities of work in the digital era
- Material, digital, and social access to online worlds
- Intertextuality of digital and material embodied experience
- Temporalities of digital co-presence
- Representations of embodiment and co-presence via digital life in regional media (journalism, advertising, film, television, literature, etc.)
Contributions to this special issue are welcome to examine these and related questions in digital contexts of Central Europe and Eurasia. *Digital Icons* particularly invites contributions that focus on the new media cultures of Armenia, Georgia, Poland, Ukraine, and Turkey, which are currently underrepresented in academic discourse. We also look forward to receiving proposals that attend to the ways in which online embodiment and digital sociality may transcend national borders.

*Digital Icons* publishes original research in the form of articles, essays, visual essays, interviews, and book reviews. In this special issue, we encourage submissions that make use of the visual media capacities of the journal's format. Images must be used with permission, and authors are responsible for obtaining permission for use and for creating image descriptions. Please visit https://www.digitalicons.org/info-for-contributors/ for complete author guidelines.

**Issue Timeline**

Please submit an abstract (500 words for research articles, 300 words for other formats) and a short bio by July 31, 2020 at digitalselves2021@gmail.com. Authors will be notified about the decision on their proposal by August 15 and will have to submit full manuscript of their contribution by November 15 for review. All articles will go through a double blind peer review, only contributions that pass it will be accepted for publication. The issue is slated for a quick turnaround to be published in *Digital Icons* in late spring 2021.

If you have any questions, please contact special issue guest editors Cassandra Hartblay and Tatiana Klepikova at digitalselves2021@gmail.com.

**Cassandra Hartblay** is an assistant professor of Anthropology and Health Humanities at the University of Toronto, Scarborough, graduate faculty in Anthropology and affiliated faculty at Centre for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at the Munk School for Global Affairs & Public Policy. Dr. Hartblay is a sociocultural medical anthropologist working in a variety of media and performance formats, with a research focus on the Russian-speaking former Soviet Union. She has held fellowships at Yale University, University of California San Diego and the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars in Washington DC. Her first book, *I Was Never Alone or Oporniki* (University of Toronto Press 2020), explores personal narratives of people with disabilities in their own words. She has published in *South Atlantic Quarterly, Current Anthropology, American Ethnologist, Slavic Review* and *JSPS*.

**Tatiana Klepikova** studied Slavic Literatures and Cultures in Passau (Germany) and Language Pedagogy and Linguistics in Yaroslavl (Russia). She is co-editor of three collections of essays, including *Privatheit in der digitalen Gesellschaft* [Privacy in a Digital Society; Duncker & Humblot, 2018] and *Outside the "Comfort Zone": Performances and Discourses of Privacy in Late Socialist Europe* (De Gruyter, 2020). She is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Toronto, where she works on a monograph about contemporary Russian
queer theater and drama. Her broader research interests include Soviet and Russian literature and the arts, gender and sexuality in Eastern and East-Central Europe, performance studies, publics and citizenship in the digital age and digital body and posthumanism.

**Works Cited**


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