# Issue 15:
# The Rhetoric of the 'New':
# Post-Digital in Cultural Post-Contexts

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EDITORIAL

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The new issue of the journal consists of two parts. The first includes research essays that had been received through our regular submission system. The second is a cluster on Bulgarian 'new' media which continues the debate we started in Issue 13 with our first cluster entitled 'Digital Creativity in Times of Crisis: Bulgaria in the Global Context'. In addition to our focus on Bulgaria, in this issue we wish to examine what the term 'new media' signifies in the current setting.

New media are only new in relation to the historical contexts in which they emerge. This is a truism, which has nevertheless not lost its significance. The printing press, the emergence of modern mass media such as the newspaper and television are among the most prominent examples lined up in the linear narrative of media history which is based on the idea of continuous progress. While some new media are no longer new, for example, computer technologies, the label 'new' is still valid. This is because the process of digitisation is still going on and is becoming increasingly ubiquitous, affecting new aspects of life and work, from communication per se to industrial production and medical service. Some digital gadgets become obsolete—although digital retro is now a new trend—they continue to influence the society and individuals by producing new configurations of power, politics and attachment, which research has grappled to understand. New buzz words continue to appear. Some of them celebrate the continuing proliferation of digital technologies such as 'internet of the things' or 'industry 4.0'. At the same time, others such as the concept of the post-digital challenge our assumptions about digitalities. Media theoretician Florian Cramer notes that post-digital has different connotations. It expresses a disenchantment with the 'new' digital media and a retro-utopian nostalgia for analogue modes of communication and entertainment (typewriting, vinyl). (For a critical account of the rather opaque term 'digital media' and its colloquial use see Florian Cramer's article "What Is 'Post-Digital'?", APRJA, 2016, http://www.aprja.net/?p=1318).)

Furthermore—and this is particularly important for our concerns—it blurs the boundaries between old and new media. It characterises the moment in time when social experiences generated by digital and networked communication technologies are applied to the previous, analogous, 'old' media and forms of human life. Cramer condenses these arguments into keywords, and the following formulas appear:

**Post-digital = hybrids of 'old' and 'new' media**

**Post-digital = 'old' media being used as 'new media'**

The current issue of *Digital Icons* has a strong, although not exclusive focus on what is called post-digital media phenomena, thus challenging the journal's own agenda in the field of 'new media studies'. In his article *Car With a Movie Camera: Theorizing Dashcams, Cameraman Surrogates, and the Cameraman Caught Unaware* (**15.1**), Andrew Chapman analyses the use of Dashcams. These are onboard cameras recording the street view through a vehicle's windscreen and may provide video evidence in the event of an accident. Through the dashcam apparatus, motorists capture unexpected incidents both relating to and outside of the flow of traffic. Dashcams account for a dominant place in the consumer landscape of video and photography today, and Chapman's article represents one of the first attempts to theorise dashcam media within the history of cinema and photography. The author does so by relying on visual materials not only from Russia, but also from Asian countries, where on-board cameras are extremely popular, too. Furthermore, Chapman uses the visual and filmic theory of the Russian vanguard filmmaker Dziga Vertov to conceptualise the dashcam movement and its astonishing popularity. While using a theoretical background tightly linked to the Russian cultural history, Chapman underlines that the dashcam phenomenon should not be understood as a 'national peculiarity of some indefinable "Russianness"', but instead as representative of the nature of digital media itself, meant to be recorded, shared and deleted instead of being watched and interpreted in the traditional sense.

Daniil Leiderman's article on *Zombies, Russians, Plague: Eastern Europe as a Sandbox for Utopia* (**15.2**) touches upon similar problems concerning the symbolic use of Eastern European landscapes in contemporary video games. He shows how the global character of media phenomena, on the one hand, and their real or imagined localisation in geographical settings, on the other, always endanger to turn local specifics into essentialist stereotypes. Examining the post-apocalyptic or zombie narrative as a contemporary means of earnestly engaging with a utopian discourse, Leiderman investigates three games incorporating the landscape of Eastern Europe as a formal support for such an engagement: 'Day-Z' (2014) by Dean Hall, 'S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl' (2007) by the Ukrainian studio GSC game world, and 'Pathologic' (2005) by the Russian studio Ice-pick Lodge. Each game provides a different meditation on violence and the utopian project by using the Soviet landscaped legacy and the zombie trope as comparable signifiers of utopia gone wrong, but equally, as a way to support imagined utopia.

These articles are followed by the 'Bulgarian cluster' which includes two articles, one essay and a book review dedicated to different aspects of media history in Bulgaria. We should note that Bulgaria—despite its strong information technology industry in the era of late socialism and a major hub for outsourcing digital work in the present day global economy—still remains peripheral in existing research on media and the internet. Thus this—and our previous Bulgarian cluster—aim to challenge the dominant paradigm by simultaneously de-

westernizing it and by re-scaling. The submissions in this section are an outcome of an international workshop entitled 'Digital Creativity in Times of Crisis: Bulgarian Networked Culture in Global Contexts', which was held at the Centre for Advanced Study in Sofia in November 2013. The workshop was generously supported by the Centre.

The cluster opens with a contribution by Martin Marinos devoted to the 'old' medium of television. In his contribution *New Media, New Habits: Socialist Television and the Struggle for 'Harmonious Consumption' in 1960s Bulgaria* (**15.3**), Marinos intends to challenge a widespread perception of socialist media as a basic tool of control and state propaganda. He proposes a new approach which focuses on the cultural functions of socialist television. Using the 1960s Bulgarian television as a case study, he traces the participation of this new medium in the construction of a unique socialist mode of consumption described in local scholarly and political literature as 'harmonious consumption'. His main argument is that through its engagement with high culture and education, socialist television constituted an alternative television model that deserves more scholarly attention.

This move towards re-considering early media practice is continued in the article by Orlin Spassov entitled *Geography of the Early Internet in Bulgaria: Territorial and Social Configurations* (**15.4**). The article studies the correlation between real and virtual geographies of the early Bulgarian internet (up to 2003). It follows a comparatively 'new' trend in internet studies which deals with the materiality and geographical embeddedness of 'cyberculture' which is often perceived to be immaterial. Spassov examines the geographical distribution of the key domain names in the country and analyses the gradual strong centralisation of the internet as a result of which almost all online resources have been produced in the capital city of Sofia. He analyses the effects of this excessive centralisation of the internet and the lack of a developed digital periphery. By doing so, Spassov shows how technological concentration, driven to a large extent by commercialisation, results in a situation where the cultural and aesthetic norms of the technological elite tend to dominate the networked culture of the country in general.

In her essay *The White Piano, Or the Dilemma of Creative versus Contestatory (e-)Citizenship* (**15.5**), Anna Krasteva focuses on the most recent period of Bulgarian 'new' media —the protest year of 2013 which showed an unprecedented activity of online and offline protesters. Krasteva addresses the sensible question of technological elites, communication patterns and value systems. She discusses the question of ethical/political versus creative/aesthetical aspects of contemporary, social media based protest. As her case study she takes the 2013 Bulgarian #Resign movement which she argues was part of the global dynamic of protest. The latter is characterised by the emergence of a global protest vocabulary, including a piano being played in public squares from Gezi to Maidan, where protesters meet and creatively articulate their agenda. Krasteva applies two research models to the case of the Bulgarian #Resign movement, the *diffusion model* of Donatella della Porta and Alice Mattoni, and the *resonance model* of Jérôme E. Roos and Leonidas Oikonomakis. By doing so, she analyses the place, the specifics and the parallels of the Bulgarian protest movement within the global contexts of creative versus contestatory citizenship. The #Resign movement, which was similar to the protest movements of the 2010s, is a post-digital because it shows how 'old' and 'new' media are mixed, for example, when protest slogans are painted on paper billboards and then spread virally on the internet. Krasteva's argument is at the same time

decidedly *non*-post-digital because she defends the utopian nature of the internet against its pragmatist critics who measure its success only in the (un)fulfillment of the political agenda, neglecting its persistent emancipatory potential for individual users.

The Bulgarian cluster concludes with a book review by Henrike Schmidt. It is a review of *Eagles' Bridge*, a novel by renowned Bulgarian writer Vladimir Zarev (**15.6**). The title refers to an iconic location in Bulgaria's capital Sofia where tens of thousands of people gathered in protest against corruption and for new political ethics. The book itself is a literary account of the Bulgarian protest movement of 2013. From a genre point of view, the novel combines the topic of the protests with the generic tropes of a mafia thriller, family saga and love story. Its protagonists articulate and embody the various political and social discourses and mythologies concerning the Bulgarian protests. These include conspiratorial assumptions such as that the Bulgarian people are unable to organise politically because of their long tradition of political subordination, and that the Bulgarian protests were paid for or bought by big geopolitical players. By turning the protest year 2013 into a work of fiction, Zarev, who is not a digital native and uses realism as his main style of representation, inscribes digital culture and new urban protest movements into Bulgarian non-digital history. His novel emerges as a kind of a protest epic in the digital era: it turns out that the 'old' medium of the novel may be an efficient tool for capturing and analysing the emerging digital networks and aesthetics.

The issue was prepared by the editors of Digital Icons. Henrike Schmidt, Orlin Spassov and Vlad Strukov worked on the Bulgarian cluster. Marianna Poberezhskaya, Natalia Konradova, Rachel Stauffer, Mykola Makhortykh, Gernot Howanitz, Pedro Hernandez and Vlad Strukov prepared the issue for publication with assistance from other members of the editorial team.

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