digital icons
Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media

Issue 18:
Digital Trauma in Eastern and Central Europe

EDITORIAL

The distribution of digital technologies opened unprecedented possibilities for remediating and reshaping individual and collective trauma. New formats of trauma transmission and trauma processing employ structural affordances of digital platforms in a multitude of ways, varying from hashtagged narratives of the Holocaust on Instagram and digitised testimonies of the Russian Revolution on Yandex to multigenre narratives of migrants on Facebook and internet memes illustrating post-war trauma on VKontakte. By looking into these and other instances of intersection between digital media and trauma, this special issue of Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media has two goals. First, it offers a conceptualisation of the novel field of digital trauma studies, which examines how individual and collective trauma is transmitted and processed through digital texts and acts on digital platforms. Second, the issue uses the digital trauma studies framework to investigate interactions between digital technology and trauma in Eastern and Central Europe.

The important role of digital media in transmitting individual and collective trauma is increasingly recognised worldwide. Until now, however, the majority of existing works focus exclusively on dissemination of recent traumatic experiences (e.g. terrorist attacks and protest actions) in Western Europe and Northern America. The current issue emphasises the urgency of examining other contexts of trauma transmission and processing by focusing on Eastern and Central Europe. The region has been impacted by collective and historical traumas that have remained unprocessed until today and some of these traumas are currently appropriated and instrumentalised by regional actors. Together with the intensive digitisation of the public sphere, which is often viewed as a response to the limited influence that ordinary citizens have on political and cultural agendas in the region, these reasons highlight the urgency of the contributions included in this issue.

The complex mnemonic landscape of Eastern and Central Europe offers rich possibilities for addressing the impact of digital technology on trauma processing. So far, digital me-

dia were mostly considered as a means of trauma dissemination; however, the contributions to the issue demonstrate that digitisation can lead to profound changes in the ways trauma is approached and processed. The ability to share and react to traumatic experiences online can eliminate the element of traumatic silence and clear ideologically blocked avenues for dealing with the traumatic past (Menyhért, this issue). At the same time, remediation of trauma can impede the process of trauma processing by strengthening existing hegemonic narratives (Wijermars, this issue) of trauma and enforcing (self)-censorship caused by platform- or community-based norms (Makhortykh, this issue).

The last aspect of digital trauma studies which the issue addresses is the changing methodological approaches towards trauma research in online environments. The abundance of digital data has led to the rise of new data sources together with new methods applicable for digital trauma studies. These methods vary from web content analysis and multimedia close reading to hashtag analysis and quantitative content analysis. However, the use of these approaches also raises a number of ethical concerns, in particular related to user privacy. The recognition of these ethical considerations together with the responsible use of sensitive data related to individual and collective trauma poses one of the major challenges for digital trauma studies.

The introductory essay written by the guest editors (**18.1**) presents the concept of digital trauma studies as a new theoretical and methodological framework of trauma-related research. The rest of the issue is divided into three thematic sections, which scrutinise different aspects of the increasing volume of interactions between digital technology and traumatic experiences in Eastern and Central Europe.

The first section (**18.2-18.3**) discusses how individual users employ digital technology to narrate and share transcultural trauma online. It opens with the article titled '"There is No Future Here": Digital Trauma Processing in Hungarian Migrants' Blogs' (**18.2**) by Anna Menyhért. Menyhért analyses the role of social media in the processing of the transcultural migratory trauma of Hungarian migrants moving to Western European countries. Based on the examination of migrant blogs and the Facebook community pages, the article traces the formation of new digital genres of trauma narration (e.g. social poetry), which allow users to creatively employ digital technology for sharing and processing traumatic experiences. In this way, digital media improve the resilience levels of migrants, and prevent the migration experience from becoming a trauma on the collective level, by not allowing traumatic silence to encompass the topic.

The approach to social media as a means of dealing with trauma is further developed in the article titled 'The Post-Trauma of the Great Patriotic War in Russia' (**18.3**) by Elizaveta Gaufman. Gaufman discusses the articulation of the post-traumatic experiences of the Second World War on digital media in the course of the ongoing Ukraine crisis. By examining discursive parallels drawn online between the suffering of the Soviet people during the Second World War and the ordeals experienced by the Russophone population of Eastern Ukraine, Gaufman displays the complex interplay between potential re-traumatisation through the pervasive exposure to Second World War memory and post-imperial trauma associated with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which became particularly prominent at the time of the Ukraine crisis.

The second section of the issue (**18.4-18.5**) moves from the micro-level of analysis to the macro-level and examines how digital narratives of trauma interact with hegemonic memory regimes in the region. The section opens with the article 'Project "1917 – Free History": Reliving the Russian Revolution in the Digital Age' (**18.4**) by Mariëlle Wijermars, who examines an online project dedicated to the centenary of the Russian revolution of 1917. This cross-platform digital initiative uses a social media feed format to produce a polyphonous narrative of the traumatic revolutionary events, thus offering an alternative to the hegemonic official narrative of the Russian revolution. The analysis of Wijermars, however, suggests that despite establishing a space for circulating alternative narratives of the revolution, the project failed to provide a consistent approach towards the fragmented past, thus limiting its potential for processing collective trauma.

The discussion of interactions between official narratives and digital practices continues in the article 'Framing the Holocaust online: Memory of the Babi Yar massacres on Wikipedia' (**18.5**) by Mykola Makhortykh. The article connects digital memory and framing theory to examine the representation of the Babi Yar massacres, an iconic episode of the Holocaust in Ukraine, through different language versions of Wikipedia, and asks how platform-specific cultural norms influence the transmission of collective trauma online. Using summative content analysis, Makhortykh compares the distribution of different frame categories in Wikipedia communities and discusses how it is influenced by the use of power play strategies by the platform's contributors. The findings of the article point out the significant impact of platform-specific practices on the way traumatic narratives are represented; at the same time, it suggests that the actual interpretations of the historical trauma remain dependent on hegemonic historical narratives in the respective societies.

Finally, the last section of the issue (**18.6-18.8**) scrutinises opportunities and challenges that arise from the use of multimedia technologies for transmitting and processing traumatic experiences by educational and research institutions. The first article of this section – 'Selfies from Auschwitz: Rethinking the Relationship Between Spaces of Memory and Places of Commemoration in The Digital Age' (**18.6**) by Maria Zalewska – discusses how digital media interact with institutional practices in the formation of the transnational Holocaust discourse. By looking into the ways the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum and Memorial officials engage with Holocaust-related content on social media, Zalewska asks to what degree these digital practices can be viewed as a reaction to intensification of online activity of Auschwitz-Birkenau visitors. The article's findings suggest that the dissemination of digital technology does not only encourage memorial institutions to engage with new socially mediated practices, but also provokes tensions between individual and institutional agency in digital curatorship of traumatic memories, which eventually can lead to the erosion of institutional control over the representation and interpretation of trauma.

The second article of this section also looks into the digitisation of the Holocaust-related trauma in Eastern Europe, but discusses its impact in the context of institutionalised research. In the article titled 'Traumatic Performances in the Digital Age: The Holocaust Bystanders' Video Testimonies' (**18.7**), Aleksandra Szczepan scrutinises interactions between digital technology and the concept of a witness, analysing digitised video testimonies of Holocaust bystanders. The analysis suggests that the ways in which bystanders' videos engage landscape, testimonies and witnesses disrupt dichotomous connections between the concept of

victim and perpetrator. They produce an unsettling experience that refashions viewers' perceptions of the traumatic past.

The discussion of the interactions between digital technology and trauma witnessing concludes in the article titled 'Digital Memorialisation and Virtual Witnessing in Galerija 11/07/95 and the War Childhood Museum' by Trevor L. Jockims (**18.8**). Jockims explores how the use of multimedia techniques facilitates contextualisation of individual and collective traumatic memories in two museums of the Bosnian War of 1992-1995, Galerija 11/07/95 and the War Childhood Museum. Drawing on the connection between Walter Benjamin's notion of aura and Giorgio Agamben's concept of witness, the article demonstrates that digital reproduction does not necessarily dispel the aura of memory objects, but instead reproduces it and makes it more accessible for museum visitors.

This special issue was inspired by the international workshop 'Trauma Studies in the Digital Age' organised by Anna Menyhért and Mykola Makhortykh in Amsterdam in 2017, in the framework of Anna Menyhért's Marie Sklodowska-Curie Individual Fellowship Research Project, titled 'Trauma Studies in the Digital Age: The Impact of Social Media on Trauma Processing in Life Narratives and in Trauma Literature: the Case of Hungary'[1]. The issue has been prepared by Menyhért and Makhortykh and produced in collaboration with the journal editors Robert Saunders, Vlad Strukov, Gernot Howanitz, Andrew Chapman, Natalia Konradova and Henrike Schmidt.

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[1] More information including the programme and the report can be found on the workshop's website: http://www.traprodig.humanities.uva.nl