Reports and Commentaries

NEW MEDIA: POLITICS, COMMUNITIES, REPRESENTATIONS
by Anastasia Sheveleva

The *New Media: Politics, Communities, Representations* workshop took place in Moscow at the Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH) on 15 April 2011. It was a one-day workshop organised by Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasiuk (RSUH), Aleksei Vasil'ev, Viktoriia Chistiakova (Russian Institute for Cultural Research)[1] with the help from postgraduate students of the Higher School of Economics (National Research University). It was part of the third annual workshop of the School of Art History at RSUH.

Workshop participants discussed the language of new media that is in use in contemporary academic communities. The main goal of the workshop was to figure out some 'universal' terms and new methods for researchers to use these terms and methods appropriately in their work on new media. The organizers also wanted to provide scholars from different universities with a platform to discuss and share their newest research, and to compare methods and terminology specific to their institutions.

The workshop addressed the following questions: 1) Can methods used to study mass media be applied to new media? 2) How do different academic schools approach new media, and how do their ways of studying new media correlate? 3) What is the importance and interdisciplinary meaning of new media studies? 4) Do new media studies have an academic tradition, or is it some sort of 'avant-garde scholarship'? 5) Where do new media studies belong aesthetically and politically? 6) What is the role of politically informed discourse in new media studies? 7) Can some macro-theory be used in new media studies? 8) What are the ways in which one can defend one's privacy in the space of new media? 9) What is the correlation between new media and 'real life'? Workshops participants presented some case studies and discussed practical methods of research in the field of new media.

Participants were drawn from the following institutions: RSUH; Russian Institute for Cultural Research; Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences; Saint Petersburg State University; Saint Petersburg Branch of the Russian Institute for Cultural Research; European Humanities University, Vilnius; Perm State University of Arts and Culture; Higher School of Economics National Research University; and Wikimedia Russia. The workshop

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[1] [Rossiiskii institut kul'turologii].

involved researchers, RSUH staff as well as post- and undergraduate students of RSUH and other participating institutions.

Figure 1. Alexei Vasil'ev and Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasuk opening the workshop

Source: N. Nazarova, T. Fedorova

The workshop started with an opening speech by **Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasiuk** (RSUH), who welcomed the participants, introduced the organizing institutions and presented the workshop as the first step in a project concerned with new methods for new media research.

In his welcome address, **Aleksei Vasil'ev** noted the importance of such workshops for Russian academic society and the interdisciplinary value of new media studies. **Viktoriia Chistiakova** argued that we should see new media as part of a whole media complex. The workshop consisted of two panels. The first panel, chaired by Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasiuk, was devoted to theoretical approaches within new media studies.

The first to speak was **Nina Sosna** (Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, *Journal of Philosoph*y), who discussed the origins of new media studies (for example in works of Foucault, Derrida and Leotard, among others). She also put forth a concept of new media in aesthetic (where we speak of perception) and political (for example – forms of social protest via new media) perspectives. According to Sosna, new media are a discrete construction, and there is no stable connection between new media and previous types of media and human communication.

Mikhail Stepanov (St. Petersburg State University, St. Petersburg Branch of the Russian Institute for Cultural Research) claimed media to be specific technical devices. He referred to Vilem Flusser who presented a history of human communication in four steps, where the last one can be associated with new media.

Figure 2/3. Mikhail Stepanov is presenting his report and answering questions

Source: N. Nazarova, T. Fedorova

Stepanov showed that this technology of the 'last step' is not connected with actual physical reality and allows one to create their own new worlds within its field. Therefore new media produce not a system of representation but an environment, which is rather an apparatus than an instrument; this is where new media's difference from mass media lie.

Viktoriia Chistiakova claimed that there must be a qualitative change for new media to appear. The essence of new media, she explained, is in their multiplicity. Since 'media is a message', as McLuhan proclaimed, different media (TV-channels, YouTube videos, photos, texts, etc.) provide different messages and all together create new media and provide new types of messages. New media have some specific features: they all exist within each other, and can be considered together. It is not virtuality or interactivity that are new media's defining feature; it is their apophatic quality. Victoriia Chistiakova ended her presentation with a question for the participants of the workshop: 'What can it be then?'

Sergei Panasiuk (European Humanities University, Vilnius) suggested McLuhan's idea of 'hot' and 'cool' media as a macro-theory that would not become outdated soon in the way that every theory in new media does. By applying this theory to new media we can see that the 'cooling' of media is connected with the process of so-called re-mediation (a term introduced by J. David Bolter and Richard Grusin), when new media mimic older ones; for example, a web-browser mimics a newspaper sheet so that it will be more comfortable for the user to assimilate new technologies. The internet, being part of new media, can easily manipulate its content. Nevertheless, the 'cooling' of new media leads to the development of a singular interface standard all over the internet.

Mikhail Manokin (Perm State University of Arts and Culture) presented his research on how phobias can form in the field of the internet. Continuing the previous presentation, he argued that such phobias are needed to slow down development of cultural innovation. His research shows that internet phobias are mostly connected with the social side of the internet.

The internet forms a certain type of communication that is anonymous and involves only verbal aspects of conversation. These two points provoke the phobia of so-called 'trolling'. Users fear that people they talk to may not be who they claim to be. It is impossible to monitor them or even to understand them properly since neither voice nor facial expressions are available. Therefore, one never knows whether or not she or he is being 'trolled'. Manokin thinks that this fear of the unknown is the main cause of the current state of the internet simply mimicking existing media technologies.

Dmitrii Mitiugov (Russian State University for the Humanities) raised the question of how public and private spheres coexist on the internet. While using internet services, the user leaves a digital footprint so that there is much information about every user that is left on the internet. This footprint may be used to provide users with more appropriate search materials and for advertising purposes. Mitiugov, thus, claimed that there is no 'private' information on the internet and put forward a notion of decentralized social networks as a future development for new media. All information in such networks is stored on a hard-drive, which is offline most of the time.

Figure 4. Mariia Kulikova is starting her presentation on the panel chaired by Ekaterina Lapina-Kratasiuk

Source: N. Nazarova, T. Fedorova

Mariia Kulikova (Higher School of Economics National Research University) spoke about a research project that she conducted together with **Svetlana Plevako** (Higher School of Economics, National Research University). Their presentation focused on the internet service jibros.com (no longer active) that collected information about requested users (one's forum accounts, e-mails, etc.) and was at the centre of public attention for some time. Kulikova claims it has actualized some problems: 1) delusiveness of internet privacy; 2) expansion of

the subject's abilities on the internet; 3) correlation between one's 'offline' and 'online' personality, and 4) representation of the 'offline' personality on the internet.

The second panel, chaired by Viktoriia Chistiakova, was devoted to local cases and practical methods.

Figure 5. Alina Vladimirova presents her research on the panel chaired by Victoria Chistiakova

Source: N. Nazarova, T. Fedorova

The first speaker, **Alina Vladimirova** (Higher School of Economics, National Research University), presented her research on Dmitrii Medvedev's blog, Twitter and video blog. She combined posted materials with her observation on actual political and social events, demonstrating how one can use web-platforms to influence a political career. Vladimirova also discussed how these attempts are received by society.

Sergei Davydov (Russian State University for the Humanities) discussed social media monitoring services such as YouScan, Buzzwar and others, in sociological and economic terms. He examined specific features of online sources: 1) the absence of an actual receiver; 2) anonymity; 3) their 'here' and 'now' quality; and 4) the variety of resources. Davydov also shared his practical experience of internet use.

Viktoriia Merzliakova (Russian State University for the Humanities) discussed how the concept of 'success' is produced on the internet. She showed several examples of this concept's representation.

Stanislav Kozlovskii (Wikimedia Russia) explained how Wikipedia is organized. Wikipedia has several features that distinguish it from most other encyclopaedias: 1) every reader can become an author; 2) all sorts of censorship and corrections are made by Wikipedia users; and 3) the knowledge presented in Wikipedia is 'current' or 'situated'

[aktual'noe], shaped by politics, ideologies and opinions, rather than a 'purely objective' knowledge.

Bulat Lambaev (Russian State University for the Humanities) discussed how civil initiative can be realized within the field of new media, addressing the issue of correlations between the form of new media and such initiative.

Diana Goderich (Russian State University for the Humanities) was the last speaker at the second panel. She presented the project of the so-called 'Museum 2.0'. Museum 2.0 works as a hypertext, allowing visitors to interact with the exhibit. Goderich discussed new opportunities for museums in the era of new media.

The *New Media: Politics, Communities, Representations* round table concluded the workshop; the participants engaged in a lively discussion concerning perspectives for new media studies in the contemporary academic world in Russia.