

The Future of Russian

Language Culture in the Era of New Technology

будущее future

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WELCOME...

...to the second newsletter of the Future of Russian project. On the following pages you will find an overview of the most important project-related activities that took place since our previous issue came out in March.

In 2012, the four-year project will be moving towards its completion that will formally occur on July 31. We intend to use the remaining time to mould our most important findings into a collective monograph on the impact of new technology on various aspects of Russian linguistic & literary culture.

The monograph is supposed to become the most tangible outcome of the project, but by far not the only one. We hope that other publication of ours, conference papers and hosted events also

contribute towards a better understanding of CMC-related phenomena in language and culture, as well as towards the development of academic networks.

We are always eager to develop our networks even further, so if you want to contact us—for more information on the project, to inform us about relevant events, publications, developments, or simply to sign up for this letter—feel free to send an email to the editor, Aleksandrs Berdicevskis, at aleksandrs.berdicevskis@if.uib.no.



Old Conflicts—New Media @ Solstrand, Norway

The Future of Russian core team

Ingunn Lunde (project leader)

Aleksandrs Berdicevskis (PhD student)

Martin Paulsen (postdoctoral researcher)

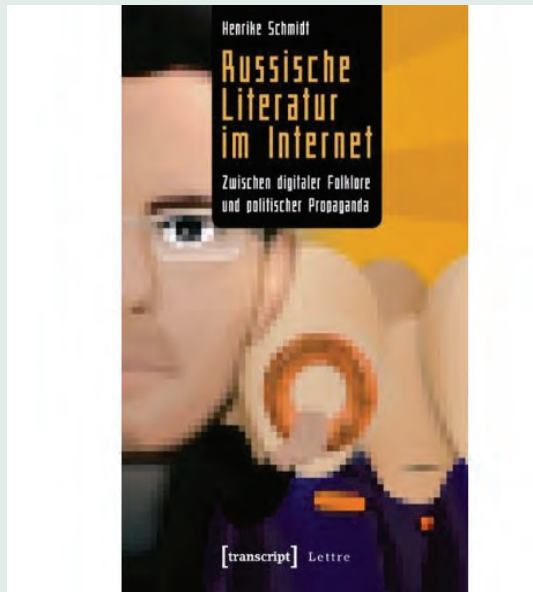
Ellen Rutten (postdoctoral researcher)

The Future of Russian project is funded by the Research Council of Norway (2008–2012).

homepage: http://www.uib.no/rg/future_r/

blog: <http://futureofrussian.wordpress.com/>

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PUBLICATIONS

The year 2011 witnessed the publication of one monograph and several articles and book chapters directly related to the main topics of the project. Here is a selection of them:

— What are various, often conflicting factors that shape the atmosphere of Russian literature on the Internet? How has the history of Runet influenced this field? These and other questions are discussed in detail in the monograph *Russische Literatur im Internet: zwischen digitaler Folklore und politischer Propaganda* [Russian Literature on the Internet: Between digital folklore and political propaganda] by **Henrike Schmidt** (transcript, ISBN 978-3-8376-1738-2).

— How does the Russian state attempt to use language and new technology as tools of ‘soft power’—cultural means of promoting ‘Russianness’ at home and abroad? **Michael Gorham** analyses two manifestations of this effort in his article “Virtual Rusophonia:

Language Policy as ‘Soft Power’ in the New Media Age” (*Digital Icons: Studies in Russian, Eurasian and Central European New Media* 5, pp. 23–48). <http://www.digitalicons.org/issue05/michael-gorham/>

— What role does the Russian-based Runet play for Eurasian webcommunities outside Russia? Russian is obviously becoming a language of inter-regional communication on the web, how justified are post-colonial anxieties about this? **Dirk Uffelmann** explores these issue in his article “Post-Russian Eurasia and the Proto-Eurasian Usage of the Runet in Kazakhstan: A Plea for a Cyberlinguistic Turn in Area Studies” (*Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2 (2), pp. 172–183). <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366511000157>

— If just one parameter of a linguistic register, viz. the communication channel, is changed, and all other parameters (speaker, hearer, subject matter) remain the same, can this change really influence language? **Aleksandrs Berdicevskis** provides empirical evidence that it can, see his article “E-mail Vs. Chat: The Influence of the Communication Channel on the Language”, *Computation Linguistics and Intellectual Technologies: Papers from the Annual International Conference 'Dialogue'* (2011), pp. 84–93. <http://www.dialog-21.ru/dialog2011/materials/pdf/6.pdf>

— Recent years have witnessed a trend towards the internationalization of CMC studies. To what extent are attempts to draw scholarly attention to languages other than English successful? **Martin Paulsen** reviews two important recent books, see “[Review of] Goggin, G. and M. McLelland (eds, 2009) *Internationalizing Internet Studies: Beyond Anglophone Paradigms* and Thussu, D.K. (ed, 2009) *Internationalizing Media Studies*” (*Digital Icons* 5, pp. 171–176). <http://www.digitalicons.org/issue05/files/2011/05/Paulsen-5.9.3.pdf>

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— It is often noted that metalinguistic reflections and activities are important features of the linguistic culture, both online and offline.

Ingunn Lunde analyses the interaction between two types of metalanguage—explicit commentary on language and linguistic reflexivity through linguistic practice—in two novels by the contemporary Russian writer Evgeny Popov, see her article “Language Ideologies in Flux: Evgenij Popov’s Response to Late and Post-Soviet Language Culture” (*Scando-Slavica* 1, pp. 7–25). <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00806765.2011.569114#preview>



Centre director Tamara Lönngren and conference co-organizer Helge Blakkisrud @ F3.5, SPb



Tine Roesen and Martin Paulsen @ F3.5, SPb

REPORTS: CONFERENCES

From March to December 2011 the project co-hosted two conferences: “Virtual Russia” in St Petersburg and “Old Conflicts, New Media” in Solstrand, Norway.

VIRTUAL RUSSIA: DIGITAL SPACE AND POST-SOVIET POLITICAL CULTURE

St Petersburg, 19–22 October 2012

by **Ingunn Lunde**

Initiated by the FoR project, “Virtual Russia” (aka F3.5) was organized in co-operation with the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI, Helge Blakkisrud) and the Bergen-based research project “Web Wars” (HERA, Ellen Rutten). The idea was that the Future of Russian team’s acquired research experience in computer-mediated varieties of Russian is of relevance to a scholarly community extending beyond Russian philology. Correspondingly, when studying twittering Presidents or online election campaigns we, the “Futurants,” feel that we should learn from, and interact with, political scientists and sociologists. In other words, our aim was to engage with scholars from across the disciplines, in an attempt to stimulate interdisciplinary research.

Ingunn Lunde (U of Bergen) opened the conference with an illustration of the relevance of studying language, language culture, political culture and the internet in combination, presenting a brief analysis of the Twitter hashtag #СПАСИБОПУТИНУЗАЭТО, which appeared

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on Putin's birthday, October 7: In order to fully assess this phenomenon, it is necessary not only to take into account our knowledge of, and ability to analyse, contemporary Russian political and social contexts, but also to be aware of the peculiar aesthetic and poetic features of the material, situate it within the tradition of Russian linguistic and political humour, add a historical dimension and, not least, contextualize the phenomenon within the specific stylistic and rhetorical dynamics of Twitter technology and usage.

The first regular sessions were devoted to blogging politicians and party leaders. Michael Gorham (U of Florida) spoke on "Medvedev's Blogging Bureaucrats: Official Models of Identity and Community in the New Media Age" and Sean P. Roberts, (NUPI) on "Old dogs, new tricks? Assessing the effectiveness of party leaders on the political Internet". Natalia Moen (NUPI) gave a talk entitled "Dear Mr. President: The Blogosphere as an Arena for Communication between People and Power," while Tine Roesen (Aarhus U) scrutinized Limonov's multimodal self-fashioning in her paper "Limonov's self-fashioning"



*Multimodal communication @ F3.5 SPb
(Photo by I. Lunde)*

Thursday's after-lunch sessions featured Oleg

Reut (U of Petrozavodsk) with a paper entitled Новые медиа в постсоветской политике: Wiki-демократия или достоверность, Tatiana Teterevleva (U of Arkhangelsk): Историческая политика в виртуальном пространстве (современной России): проблемы репрезентации и интерпретации прошлого; Natalia Sokolova (U of Samara): "SecondRussia, или политические игры в виртуальных игровых мирах" — on the political dimension of computer games, for instance, patriotic games such as "Stalin protiv Marsian"; and, finally, Elena Morenkova-Perrier (Université Panthéon-Assas (Paris 2)): Память о советском прошлом в российской блогосфере, including assessments of holy wars about Russian history on the RuNet.

On Friday Martin Paulsen (U of Bergen) set out with a paper on "The National Politics of Domain Names: Russia and Ukraine dealing with ICANN", suggesting explanations as to why the Russians set up a Cyrillic domain so much faster than the Ukrainians. Next came Gasan Gusejnov (Центр гуманитарных исследований РАНХиГС), who spoke on Политическое (само) образование в рунете, presenting several online educational projects. Johanna Dahlin (Linköping U) gave a paper entitled "Virtual remembering", on the virtual presence of students' organisations searching for missing soldiers (*ingria-poisk.ru*). Hélène Dounaevsky (Université de Corse) joined us via Skype and presented a talk entitled: "Forged Proofs, Real Hatred: The Place & Role of Fakes in 'Memory Wars'". The topic of memory wars was followed up by Ellen Rutten (U of Bergen), who spoke on "Digital Diaspora: Social Media and Russian-Ukrainian Memory Wars", testing current theory on digital memory studies on post-Soviet practice, and Vera Zvereva (U of Bergen/RGGU), who spoke on "The Language of Memory in Digital Ru.net Communities", providing a fascinating analysis of the rhetoric

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and style of online commemorative practices. Helge Blakkisrud (NUPI) offered some concluding remarks, summing up the main issues and topics of the conference.

Last but not least, we enjoyed the hospitality of the Norwegian University Centre (<http://www.st-petersburg.uio.no/english/>), delightful dinners in Russian and Georgian restaurants and some partly sunny partly chilly days in St Petersburg. @martpaulsen, @ingunnlunde, @webwarsproject and @johanna_dahlin twittered live from the sessions; podcasts of the papers will soon be available at the Future of Russian site (http://www.uib.no/rg/future_r/)



*Afternoon walk to Oseana @ WebWars conference, Solstrand, Norway
(Photo by M. Gerretsen)*

OLD CONFLICTS, NEW MEDIA: COMMEMORATING THE SOCIALIST EXPERIENCE ONLINE

Solstrand, 31 August - 2 September 2011

by **Ellen Rutten and Aleksandrs Berdicevskis**

Post-socialist digital memories were the topic of

‘Old Conflicts, New Media,’ a 3-day gathering in the Norwegian fjords of 22 European/Australian media experts, (literary & cultural) historians, linguists, sociologists, political scientists, and psychologists. The conference was organized by the Web Wars team, part of the “Memory at War”-project. It was co-funded by HERA and “Future of Russian”. In what proved to be a fruitful “experimental laboratory” (Vera Zvereva) of digital research methods and approaches, participants pondered how the socialist experience is mediated online. We offer snapshots of the topics under discussion:

- According to London/Sydney-based media scholar **Anna Reading**, “the global memory field” annihilated Roma’s erasure from the (Central-)European past.
- “How” — “Memory at War”-project leader **Alexander Etkind** asks — “to quantify the distinctions between cultural amnesia, nostalgia, and melancholia” in post-Soviet society?
- Harvard’s Mapping the Russian Blogosphere project boasts ample mistakes, according to London-based linguist-cum-IT-expert **Galina Nikiporets-Takigawa**.
- **Volodymyr Kulyk**, political scientist at the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, spots “thousands of history-related groups” and “discussions that last for years” on the Ukrainian Facebook pendant Vkontakte.
- Do post-Soviet online media increase “options for emulating transnational community for the service of national goals?” **Jussi Lassila** (U of Helsinki) muses.
- When cultural memory is being transmitted through Facebook, the features of the medium influence the transmission, contributing to the democratization of history, claims **Dieter de Bruyn** (U of Ghent).

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- Is there any alternative to the Myth of Victory in the strictly regulated Belarus public discourse, asks **Aliaksei Lastouski** (National Academy of Sciences of Belarus) and finds such alternatives on the internet, existing “in the mode an intellectual ghetto”.
 - Similarly, an online image of Romanian leader Nicolae Ceaușescu is more ambiguous and complex, than one emerging from the official offline discourse, claims **Caterina Preda** (U of Bucharest).
 - **Gernot Howanitz** (U of Salzburg) looks at how computer games recreate the Soviet past and concludes that they rather rewrite than carefully reconstruct it.
 - How do editors of Wikipedia manage to achieve a consensus in sensitive cases, asks **Hélène Dounaevsky** (Université de Corse), and provides a detailed analysis of “edit wars” at the “laboratory” where history is being constantly rewritten.
 - Another “online war” is explored by **Masha Pasholok** (U of Oxford), who analyses the Russian-Ukrainian discussions of Crimea, paying particular attention to the visual component.
 - **Martin Paulsen** (U of Bergen) focuses on the discussion of another sensitive issue of Ukrainian history, Holodomor, and analyses how Holodomor-related discourse is mediated in Twitter.
 - Before the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, online media in Georgia seemed to be more focused on the solution and cooperation than traditional press media, argues **Doreen Spörer-Wagner** (U of Zurich) on the basis of a solid quantitative study.
 - Unexpectedly, Russian-language online media in Latvia pay more attention to domestic Latvian news (at the expense of the international ones) than Latvian-language ones, claim **Tatjana Russita** and **Aleksandrs Berdicevskis** (U of Bergen) who analysed this and other differences between the media published in the two languages.
 - Russian bloggers users often interpret the collective historical traumas through their own family histories, argues **Ilya Kukulín** (Higher School of Economics), noting, however, that this family memory is not the only method of “personal-genealogical” interpretation of history.
 - Popular digitally mediated commemorations of the Soviet linguistic heritage are different from the academic collections, claims **Ingunn Lunde** (U of Bergen), highlighting three aspects that are particularly important for the former: reflections on the memory act itself, specific context of a linguistic element, and a personal link to a concrete experience.
- More elaborate reports will follow soon, both in the form of conference reviews in the academic journals *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie* and *Digital Icons*; and in the shape of an edited volume: *Web Wars: Commemorating the Socialist Experience Online* (Julie Fedor, Ellen Rutten,

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Vera Zvereva, eds.; circulating), which includes contributions by four Futurants.

PANELS AND PAPERS

ASEEES Convention, Washington D.C., November 17–21 2011

by **Ellen Rutten**

For an institution that prides itself on being “the leading private organization in the world dedicated to the advancement of knowledge” about post-Soviet space, ASEEES is still hosting remarkably unwired conferences. Real-time conference tweeting and blogging are by now thriving throughout academia, but at its annual convention, the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies—to cite its full name—did not host its own Twitter address. Guests of the wonderful Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington D.C.—the convention’s home basis—had to pay for wifi access. And for visitors, wiring laptops was a complicated administrative affair. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, no more than seven or eight out of over 2000 of conference guests posted tweets with an ASEEES hashtag.

On a positive note, however, the conference hotel was wonderful, the mood good, and some panels that this participant visited truly sparkled. And although digital technologies – a special interest of the same participant – were not used actively to share new insights, they did play first fiddle in several exciting media-devoted panels. Active Future partner Gasan Guseinov blogged on one such panel, titled “The Role of Blogging in Post-Soviet Research,” on his blog **loquarius**; to read it, surf to <http://loquarius.livejournal.com/3403.html>.

The Future of Russian team itself also actively participated, with both a project-related panel and a number of individual papers. Alternative



ASEEES 2011. Omni Shoreham Hotel.

project panel, chaired by Ab Imperio editor Marina Mogilner. Michael Gorham opened the floor with a talk on blogs launched by Russian political leaders. Blogging governors—so Gorham argued—consciously employ anti-authoritarian discourse to create symbolic distance from those in power and proximity to “the people.” Yours truly then discussed a powerful trend in post-Soviet creative culture: that of foregrounding aesthetic imperfection to convey artistic authenticity in an age of digital perfection. Dirk Uffelmann offered an insightful discussant’s take on both talks; among other things, Uffelmann drew attention to the role of freedom in Gorham’s analyses, and the intra- and intercultural dimension of the aesthetics of imperfection.

The same three participants discussed other (more or less directly project-related) research findings in round tables on The Spoken Word in Imperial Russia (Gorham) and Postcolonial Memory in Eastern Europe (Uffelmann and Rutten). Meanwhile, Future partners Lara Ryazanova-Clarke and Gasan Guseinov presented their work in three more panels devoted to post-Soviet culture and/or new media. In an exciting, all-British session on Russian Authors Online, Ryazanova-Clarke

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examined how writers construct (political and social) authority in digital media; and Guseinov participated in a particularly topical twofold round table, with the title Contemporary Russian Politics and Society and the Prospects for the Current Decade.

Apart from these strictly session-related appearances, the “Futurants” did what people do at conferences: consolidate existing contacts, plan new projects, and meet other specialists. Most importantly, these less formal activities resulted in an invitation to Bergen to long-standing media specialist Stephen Hutchings: at next year’s concluding project conference, professor Hutchings will offer a keynote on the relationship between technology and culture in Russia. In other words: to be continued.

OTHER

...conference papers presented by futurants include (but are not limited to):

- “Web Wars: Russische en Oekraïense sociale media & het Sovjetverleden” by **Ellen Rutten**. SEELECTS seminar series, University of Gent, Belgium; 28.04.2011.
- “Post-Soviet Art: How Digital Perfection Breeds Aesthetic Imperfection” by **Ellen Rutten**. St. Antony’s College, Oxford, UK; 03.05.2011.
- “Battles for Historical Memory: Dealing with Disputable Events on Ru.Net/Ukr.Net” by **Vera Zvereva**. East European Memory Studies Research Group Seminar, Cambridge, UK; 25.05.2011
- “(Russian) Digital Language: The Transcultural Prism” by **Ellen Rutten**. Von der digitalen zur interkulturellen Revolution [From the digital revolution to the intercultural one] Conference,

University of Passau, Germany (Skype presentation); 08.07.2011.

- “Gibt es einen russischen Cyberimperialismus gegenüber dem ‘Nahen Ausland’ (mit Blick auf Kasachstan und Turkmenistan)?” [Is there such a thing as Russian cyberimperialism towards the ‘near abroad’ (with regard to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan)?] by **Dirk Uffelmann**. Von der digitalen zur interkulturellen Revolution [From the digital revolution to the intercultural one] Conference, University of Passau, Germany; 09.07.2011.

DISSEMINATION

Futurants have been actively involved in the dissemination of research results, methods and ideas via different channels: publishing popular-science articles, being interviewed by mass-media, teaching and so on. A few illustrative examples:

- **Ingunn Lunde**, **Martin Paulsen**, **Aleksandrs Berdicevskis** and **Gasan Gusejnov** together with other colleagues from the University of Bergen taught the course “Norms and language” at the Bergen Summer Research School in June. The audience consisted of nearly 20 PhD-students and young scholars from all over the world.
- **Martin Paulsen** was interviewed by a Norwegian radio show NRK P2 Kulturnytt on “Internett-sensur mot kulturelt forfall i Russland” [Internet-censorship against the cultural decay in Russia]
- **Ellen Rutten** was interviewed by a Dutch newspaper on “Vkontakte vs Facebook”, see <http://www.depers.nl/economie/556735/VKontakte-vs-Facebook.html>

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EVENTS: GUESTS

The project has hosted three guest lectures in Bergen: In March **Ilya Kukulkin** gave a talk entitled *Рассторжение брака? Литература и медиа в России на рубеже 2010-х*.

The famous Russian writer **Mikhail Shishkin** came to Bergen in September to give the Annual Landslide Lecture with a talk on *БЫТЬ РУССКИМ ПИСАТЕЛЕМ*. He also participated in a presentation at University of Bergen's student society, reading his short story *Пальто с хлястиком* (in Russian, accompanied by Norwegian translation on the screen) and being interviewed by **Ingunn Lunde** and **Martin Paulsen**.

Finally, **Maxim Kronhaus** (Russian State University for the Humanities) gave a lecture in December entitled *Русский язык и технический прогресс*.

Kronhaus' and Kukulkin's lectures are available as podcasts: http://www.uib.no/rg/future_r/publications/podcasts.



Mikhail Shishkin in Bergen (photo by I. Lunde)

NEXT: UPCOMING EVENTS

The core group looks forward to welcoming in Bergen professor **Jannis Androutsopoulos** (U of Hamburg) who will run a project-related workshop and possibly give a talk for a wider audience (the visit was rescheduled from October 2011 to February 2012).

In late April, the traditional "week of Russian literature" will be held in Oslo. This time the Russian blogosphere will be a main theme of the event, and the "Future of Russian" project will be co-organizer, with **Ingunn Lunde** and **Martin Paulsen** actively involved.

Finally, as was mentioned above, we are working on a collective monograph with a central question "How does new technology/CMC influence Russian language and linguistic culture"? Analyses will focus on language, literature and politics, as well as on the special role of social media. The book will also contain a large background chapter that will provide an overview of historical, social, cultural, economical and political contexts important for the development of the Runet. All the project members and several invited authors will contribute to the book.

In June 2011, all the authors and several "external" commentators (among them **Stephen Hutchings**, **Ilya Kukulkin**, **Vladimir Plungian** and **Sali Tagliamonte**) will meet at Solstrand to discuss the first drafts of book chapters.