

## EDITORS' FOREWORD

The contents of this issue of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* are partly the result of happy coincidence. In 2010, the editorial board included, in its plans for round-tables in the following year, a discussion on the role of the internet in academic life. Has the increasing availability of information at the click of a mouse been, on balance, positive or negative in the development of the humanities and social sciences? How should one offset access to extremely valuable data-bases and online libraries, not to speak of massive amounts of primary material for the study of topics such as public opinion and the history of everyday life, against the often overwhelming quantities of libellous rant from 'trolls', the plethora of information that poses as factual yet is difficult to verify, and the expanding field for inert and uncritical reproduction of research materials? These were the broad issues with which our participants grappled.

Then, in December 2011, the importance of the internet as a research resource was suddenly underlined by the election-rigging protests in Russian cities. Not only were participants in protest meetings often alerted on social websites such as VKontakte.ru and Facebook, but the placards and folklore that sprang up round the meetings rapidly 'went viral' on the internet, and also drew from online materials and from the specific jargon of computer-users. As well as the discussion of the Internet's role in the abstract, then, this number includes an important collection of preliminary discussions of its significance in a concrete sense during the election-rigging protests, a development that has been one of the most important features in the recent Russian political landscape.

At the time of writing (August 2012), the Russian government was attempting to institute controls over access to ‘illegal’ websites, and a number of prominent bloggers had found themselves the target of legal action that was clearly provoked by their online activities, cite though it did a range of unconnected offences. At the same time, though, the online community remained a powerful force of criticism and agitation, as was witnessed by the widespread campaigning – international as well as national – in support of the punk protest group, Pussy Riot, on trial for ‘hooliganism’ and ‘offence to religious feelings’, and the internet outcry over their sentence.<sup>1</sup> Though filming was forbidden in the courtroom, instant commentaries were relayed over social websites, and the pictures and footage of the fracas outside the courtroom spread round the world.

Alongside the discussions of December 2011, this issue also includes articles that are related to the two separate strands in the number – the Internet, and the current state of Russian politics. Zinaida Vasileva provides an overview of work, particularly by French scholars, dealing with the communicative innovations and uncertainties that have resulted from expanding use of long-distance networks such as video- and teleconferencing. Sergei Alymov – in an article that represents a further contribution to the material on urban studies which appeared in no. 7 – discusses the present effects of memories of perestroika in a small town that is within the orbit of Moscow, yet also peripheral to the capital.

In the circumstances, it is particularly appropriate that this issue of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture* should also be the first in which we publish translations from the online supplement to the journal, which began publication at the end of 2009, and now appears twice annually. Some materials published in the supplement are suitable for online access only (for example, those including audio files and substantial quantities of images), but selected items will from now on also appear in this ‘terrestrial English-language version of the journal as well.

As always, we are extremely grateful to our translators (Ralph Cleminson and Rosie Tweddle), and to the authors whose work appears here for their help, and to the editorial staff of *Forum for Anthropology and Culture*, particularly Olga Boitsova and Alexandra Piir.

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<sup>1</sup> As a (once again online!) protest by lawyers in August 2012 cogently argued, these two offences are distinct: in a secular state, offending the feelings of believers represents an affront to the attitudes of one section of the population, and not an assault on society at large (which, under Russian law, is the definition of hooliganism).