

The Internet and Academic Life

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The Internet and Academic Life

The dramatic impact of electronic resources on intellectual life has few historical parallels; probably only the emergence of print, or indeed written culture in the first place, can be compared with it. A great deal of discussion has been devoted to the topic, yet many questions relating to the perception of scholarly knowledge and the ways in which this functions in the new electronic world have barely been addressed. No doubt, this situation is to some extent inevitable, given that we are caught up in the process of cultural transformation and hence unable to distance ourselves from it, but some pressing issues still do require discussion. The Editorial Board accordingly circulated the following questionnaire to a broad sample of scholars working on society and culture:

1

The emergence of this new, to all intents and purposes delimited, field of information has not only made the boundaries of ‘scholarly’ or ‘academic’ discussion more porous and more flexible, but has completely displaced, indeed effaced, these. The criteria by which commentary used to be identified as scholarly have been radically altered. It is possible to find texts with all the characteristics of ‘scholarly’ texts on popular sites, and completely unprofessional materials on so-called ‘academic’ sites. More

importantly, there has been an explosion of materials that are difficult or impossible to classify in terms of the old categories. What are your reactions to this dilution of knowledge, how do you view its likely development in the future, and can the academic community (and should the academic community) attempt to do anything to change things?

2 The Internet has generated new forms of communication and knowledge exchange, including those between scholars. It has done much to erode the old hierarchies (for instance, ‘metropolitan’ communities versus ‘provincial’ ones, ‘prestigious’ universities and institutes versus less prestigious ones). In online forums, participants may include students and members of the general public alongside professors and experts with strings of publications. Yet some scholars have little or nothing to do with the virtual world, beyond using email (and sometimes not even that). How do you yourself regard the new forms of scholarly community that have emerged in the electronic world, and what do you see the likely results of the changes as being?

3 For students (whether graduate or undergraduate), and indeed many more senior researchers, the Internet has become not just *a* research resource, but *the* research resource, displacing libraries, archives and other repositories of information. Yet the problem of assessing the reliability and authenticity of online sources remains — indeed, it is becoming more vexed. How do you yourself approach these issues?

4 The Internet has more and more prominence as a kind of virtual ‘field’ that sociologists, anthropologists, folklore specialists and others use as a source for primary materials (as well as, or instead of, materials collected from ‘live’ informants). Yet it is clear that such materials are of quite specific kinds, and that their character has still to be properly explored by the scholarly community (though some work is beginning to be done on this). Where do you yourself see the specificities of Internet materials, and what is the best way of approaching them?

Please also provide the following biographical information:

Your age, and/or the scholarly generation to which you would assign yourself (older, younger, middle)

To what extent (if any) has your own work been altered under the influence of the Internet (radically, markedly, not much, not at all)?

MARIA AKHMETOVA

1

I don't see any particular problem. First of all I think it is too early to speak of any dilution of academic knowledge or to say that the previous criteria of a scholarly text have ceased to operate. After all, in the days before the Internet there used to be popular publications about, say, folklore and ethnography which contained both extracts from serious academic texts and extracts from well-known forgeries like the works of I. P. Sakharov, dilettante essays on the 'fundamental myth' by the compilers of these publications, and field notes of unknown reliability recorded by unknown persons — and there still are. Naturally there were fewer such books than there are such sites, because it costs more to publish a book than to put a site or a blog on the Net. Moreover, it takes a certain effort to get hold of a book (one has to go to a library or a bookshop), whereas the whole of cyberspace is open to us wherever there is a computer with an Internet connexion. But as to trusting what you read on the Internet, decent scholars have not been relieved of their obligation to verify their sources. What is more, would a decent scholar cite a dubious edition of a serious scholarly work? Hardly. So he's not likely to cite it from a dubious site, either.

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Obviously, not all researchers are decent scholars. There are, in the first place, careless

students who copy material from the Internet for their essays, coursework, presentations etc. In the second place, there are unscrupulous researchers — not to beat about the bush, hacks and plagiarisers. (Admittedly, there always have been, though our colleagues who teach say that copying has become more prevalent amongst students since the Internet appeared.) In the third place are people who for one reason or another are interested in the same subjects as scholars, but are not themselves academics: these may be private individuals who ‘study’ as a leisure activity, or journalists, writers and suchlike. The first category (the careless students) probably do little harm, though they may turn into the second (plagiarisers with degrees), who do considerably more. There is software that can be used against both, such as *Anti-Plagiat* and *Detektor Plagiata*. As for the third, if they are writers as well as readers of Internet texts, a decent scholar will take a critical attitude to their work (as indeed he or she will to any text, whatever its form).

2

Whether or not to participate in web communication is to a large extent a matter of what one is used to. Probably the next generation of researchers will, to paraphrase a certain expression from the Soviet period, live entirely ‘under the Internet’.¹ However I do not really understand how participation in a forum can do away with the previous hierarchy. Of course it is easy to imagine a student or graduate student who logs on to a forum anonymously or under an impenetrable alias in order to be rude to a ‘prof’ whom he dislikes, but we nevertheless live, teach, sit examinations, and defend theses in the real world, where a student is a student and a lecturer is a lecturer.

The benefit derived from scholarly communication over the Net should be evident to everybody. Participation in mailing lists, book exchanges (such as the splendid digital library Dlibrary), specialised forums, blogs and social networks lets colleagues from different cities (or indeed countries) not only discuss academic topics, but simply discover each other’s existence, and also to assist each other by exchanging information about the literature or exchange actual publications in electronic form which may not be universally available, share information about conferences, grants and competitions, and call for contributors to themed editions of journals or collections of articles, etc. I can testify from my own experience to the benefit of such platforms for the exchange of information, as a participant (and, together with Mikhail Alekseevsky and Alexandra Ippolitova, a moderator) of the <ru_folklorist> community on LiveJournal. Though this is not a numerous community, with fewer than 400 readers (folklore is a fairly narrow discipline), it is a lively

¹ ‘The present generation of Soviet people will live under Communism!’ — a famous sentence from Khrushchev’s speech at the Twenty-Second Congress of the Communist Party in 1961. [Trans.]

one. I might also mention some other humanities blogs on LiveJournal, such as the linguistics community <terra_linguarum> (over 2,000 readers) and the social anthropology community <soc_anthrop> (over 1,000). The existence of open communities that anyone can subscribe to, in addition to the closed professional communities such as the Academia.Edu social network, is a good means of popularising genuine academic knowledge, not in the sense of ‘dilution’, as the word was used in the first question to the forum, but in the sense, if I may use the expression, of academic propaganda.

There is, however, another side to it. The more popular a particular academic field is in society as a whole (and especially if its popularity has ideological connotations), the greater the number of ‘interested people’ in the relevant internet community who are not professional scholars but have simply ‘read something and want to express an opinion’, and, consequently, the greater the number of discussions that have nothing to do with scholarship. An example of this are the numerous historical communities, in particular <ru_history> (over 5,000 readers), where despite a justifiably firm policy of moderation, there are periodical outbreaks of far from scholarly ‘flames’ on the subject of the Civil War, the Second World War, and other subjects that stir the emotions of the populace. I have not looked at political science blogs, but I suspect that the situation there is even worse. However, this too is hardly a case of the ‘dilution of academic knowledge’, since it changes no one’s opinion.

3

It seems to me that this question consists of two points.

On the first point (the Internet as an information repository) I see no serious problem. If a researcher (or indeed, a student or graduate student) is neither lazy nor unscrupulous, then without question the Internet *cannot* replace libraries and archives, particularly the latter. Of course, if absolutely all the literature necessary for a particular research project had been uploaded to the Web, then it could. However, this by and large does not happen where published materials are concerned, still less for archival materials. As for the literature, it is good if the full text of books and articles is uploaded (as digital text or as scanned copies), and if the people who upload scanned books understand the purposes for which literature is placed on the Net and therefore make at least an attempt at proofreading the scanned text, and restore the pagination. One cannot, however, make serious use of unproofed copies, in which there may be a large number of scanning errors affecting characters and diacritics, and whole sections of text may simply disappear. In this sense, therefore, the Internet has a useful, but ancillary function in research work.

I would also like to mention the well-known ‘Google Books’ service, which includes quite a lot of scanned literature, including works of

scholarship. However, most of these are available only as a limited number of pages or just as snippets, so that one has to go to the library anyway to see the rest, and in any case one has to verify references to periodicals, as the service gives only the page number and year, but not the volume number. But in the search for information this is a serious and very useful finding aid, which assists greatly in searching the literature and sources.

It seems to me that the second point, regarding the reliability of texts, is connected with, or rather flows from the first. When it is a question of Internet texts as sources, then if they are the only material for a particular research project (on the specifics of Internet communication or on the language of the Internet, for example), then the library will have nothing to offer in the way of sources. If, however, we are considering the Internet as a corpus of sources for research on questions which are not exclusively concerned with Internet communication, then the question of the verification of these sources does arise, but it is in my opinion a fairly simple matter.

Let me give an example. Suppose that I am trying to use Internet data to establish the regional distribution of the custom of 'waiting for sunrise' on the eve of St Peter and St Paul's Day. (This means that young people spend the night outside, waiting for the 'playful' sun to rise and engaging in various forms of misbehaviour.) I come across a text from the web version of the newspaper *Zainskiye Novosti* (published in Zainsk in the Tartar Republic) of 22 July 2004, describing how 'the young people of the village go out into the fields the evening before and, free of parental supervision, spend the whole night "waiting for sunrise". [...] The old people assert that the custom of waiting for the sunrise was originally intended to keep water sprites away from the village. [...] Petermas has always been celebrated in Zainsk.'

At first sight this may be considered a witness to the knowledge of the custom at the relevant locus (although the somewhat old-fashioned style may concern the attentive reader). However, a search reveals that the paper is simply quoting a fragment from S.V. Maksimov's *Krestnaya sila [The Power of the Cross]*, one of those texts, incidentally, which 'are endlessly reproduced on the Web'. The journalist has woven this fragment so skilfully into his text, that one might think that the young people of the Zainsk region really do wait for sunrise, and that the old people tell them about the water sprites that walk abroad on St Peter's Eve.

By contrast, I do consider as a relevant source, reflecting actual experience and use of language, a notice on the *Orlovskoe informbyuro* site for 12 July 2007 saying that police patrols in Oryol had been stepped up on St Peter's Eve in order to prevent 'aggressive behaviour by young people "waiting for sunrise"', and likewise

an entry on a forum by a girl from Oryol ('we carefully kept awake all night, waiting for the sun to start to come up').

The Internet certainly provides the opportunity for copying texts, but it frequently also allows one to discover the original source, or at least to determine what has been copied from where.

Of course, in order to do so one needs some experience of Internet searches, and also some knowledge of how to work with sources in general. It is quite probable (one might hope) that the time will come when the techniques for dealing with primary sources will include 'internetology'. In any case, that is where the continual expansion of the Internet is leading.

4

In answering this question I shall leave aside those problems that are exclusively concerned with the study of web communication and its practices, the language of the Internet, web communities and their jargon, etc. I shall moreover deal with the most specific sources connected with communication over the web (primarily blogs, forums, chat rooms and social networks).

In the first place, the specific features of the web 'field' arise naturally from such universally known peculiarities of web communication as virtuality and anonymity. I shall give an example directly connected with my present interest in the Internet (the identification of regional variants of lexis, set expressions and texts). Let us say, the personal details of the author of the utterance that interests us are not always evident (blogs and forums do not always indicate a person's place of residence, and if they do, it may not be the same as his place of birth, which is of cardinal importance in certain questions; forums also very rarely give any indication of age). Sometimes this can be deduced from other data (for example, if the profile links to a page in a social network such as Vkontakte or Odnoklassniki, which will usually give this information). Sometimes one has to ask the author directly — it is much easier and more productive to do this on a blog than on a forum. They may, of course, not answer, but more often than not they do. One may, of course, encounter a virtual personality, whose data correspond to reality only partially or not at all. For example, when I was conducting a survey on LiveJournal, one of my informants was a girl whose profile stated that she had been to school in Kimry and was now studying in Moscow. But from personal correspondence with her I knew that she had spent all her life in Nizhny Novgorod, and just liked the sound of 'Kimry'. There is no guarantee that the profiles of any of the other informants were true, but it appears to me that such cases are rare, and my feeling is (though I may be wrong), that with the growing popularity of social networks Internet users are more and more inclined to supply correct information about themselves.

Secondly, these specific features are the result of the fact that the texts placed on the Internet are written (even though web communication is close to speech). The greater the size of the text, the more striking will be the difference between the way it is expressed on the Internet and the way it would have been expressed orally. For research into subjects and motifs this may not be such a big problem, but for research into poetics it must be quite serious.

Thirdly, the specific features of the material are connected with the active Internet users' milieu. Where blogs are concerned, some statistics have recently been gathered, and according to the latest issue of the *Blogosfera Runeta* [Russian Internet Blogosphere] bulletin, the average blogger is a twenty-two-year-old girl from Moscow.¹ We can also see a different distribution of blogs in Russian-speaking space: Moscow, St Petersburg and Kiev take the first three places, with 49,000, over 37,000 and over 15,000 bloggers respectively. There are fewer than 10,000 bloggers in other cities, and they are distributed unevenly: for example, in Samara, with a population of 1,133,000, there are considerably more bloggers than in Kazan, with a population of 1,138,000.

In other words, it is mostly young people living in big cities who engage in communication over the Net. For this reason the information contained in the blogs (including data relevant to folklore and ethnography, even in its most traditional aspect), is conditioned by socio-cultural factors. We are not likely to find much relevant material on the rituals connected with cattle farming in blogs, but there is plenty of material there on fortune-telling or children's games, for example.

Finally, there is one more problem, which is concerned not with actual research, but with the attribution, publication and editing of materials, namely citations and references to web sources. A 'paper' source is normally permanent (leaving aside cases where documents are destroyed or publications suppressed). An entry on a forum may be removed by the moderator, a blogger may take down his blog, and a forum may be shut down for non-payment. The text will, of course, be preserved in the caches of search engines, but not for ever.

The purpose of a reference is to indicate where an interested person may find the document in question. If the document has been removed, then no information about the 'date of retrieval' (the formula provided by GOST R 70.5–2008)² will help to find it. The

¹ *Blogosfera Runeta*, Spring 2009, based on data from a Yandex search of blogs: <http://download.yandex.ru/company/yandex_on_blogosphere_spring_2009.pdf>. As far as I am aware there are no such statistics for forums and social networks, and if there were, they might show something rather different.

² The Russian national standards body's 'System of standards on information, librarianship and publishing. Bibliographic reference. General requirements and rules of making' [sic]. [Trans.]

same national standard, incidentally, prescribes that a forum should be cited in a way which will not allow anyone to find the required document: the model citation indicates only the URL of the forum, whereas the URL of the page containing the cited text may be completely different. Does this mean that the URL of the page should be cited in full? It seems to me that there is not always good reason for this, because if the entry is removed, this will be no use, and if dozens of entries are added to the forum after the time when it was cited, its URL may be modified with time; and if the entry is made on a social network, then it is completely pointless to cite its URL. (Not to mention the fact that a complete URL may be extremely long, and reproducing it extremely inconvenient from the publisher's point of view.) It may of course be objected that the text may be found without entering the URL on a computer or opening a 'paper' publication, but by entering a fragment of the quoted text into the search field of Yandex, for example. But this is also problematical: in the first place, the search engine may not come up with the text on the basis of the fragment entered (a technical problem beyond the purview of the current discussion). Secondly, if an author or editor has corrected the spelling of the text, nothing will be found (it is well known that Internet users' spelling and punctuation are frequently atrocious and in the majority of cases — with the possible exception of 'Olbanian'¹ and similar orthographies — there is no justification for leaving them uncorrected).

I do not know how this problem can be solved, but personally in the majority of cases I find it sufficient to cite the name of the forum or blog, the date or year, and if necessary, the subject.

In fact the Internet does provide very rich possibilities for finding and collecting information, including completely traditional folkloric and ethnographic data (except, of course, for completely obsolete practices), and it cannot be ignored. Obviously the Web is no substitute for an expedition. But thanks to Internet searches and analysis of the texts that they turn up, one can uncover the present-day currency of various ritual practices, texts and their variants, and set expressions (including, for example, their regional distribution), all without leaving the house. If we regard the Internet as a corpus of texts, it is important to know what keywords to enter into the search field — but that is a technical question.

The Internet also offers good opportunities for conducting surveys, from simple box-ticking to questionnaires requiring more or less extensive answers. However, it must be remembered that the smaller the number of people visiting a particular platform, the fewer replies

¹ A style of writing Russian used in some Internet circles and consisting of a phonetic spelling as far removed as possible from standard orthography. [Trans.]

we shall receive — and by no means everyone does reply. For example, when I conducted a survey in a community which had at that time more than 8,000 readers, I received just over 300 usable replies (and I had to contact a number of the informants in order to obtain more exact information). It is harder with a full-scale, ‘quality’ interview, which is understandable: it may be physically more difficult for an Internet user to undertake a long correspondence than to answer the interviewer’s questions orally. However, my own and my colleagues’ experience shows that the results obtained from such interviews are often very useful.

Short questionnaire

Born 1978 (‘younger generation’).

Changed considerably.

ANDREI ALEKSEEV

We must agree that the Internet is not just a new piece of technology, it is a social institution that has grown up before our very eyes, and the operation of which over the last twenty years has left a real imprint on the activity of all other institutions. The Internet is a most important element and factor in the current information revolution.

Regarding scholarship, the Internet has, as a minimum, these basic functions: (a) the dissemination of knowledge; (b) technical provision for scholarly communication; (c) an information source or resource. Functions (a) and (b) are external, but (c) is a function of the Web which is internal to the social institution of scholarship.

The modern scholar who refuses or is unable to use these three aspects of the Internet is practically doomed to a catastrophic loss of personal potential for discovery, communication and creation.

The Internet is admittedly a very weakly differentiated informational space, in which high-quality knowledge is mixed up with informational garbage, where mass, specialised and personal communication are interwoven,

where science rubs shoulders with parascience and so on. But this, in reality, is characteristic not only of the Internet, but of modern communications in general.

The role of professional, moral and, if you like, aesthetic *choice of subject* increases with the use of the Internet. The Internet user, whether seeking for information, using electronic communications or communicating with the public, is constantly placed in the position of the *expert*. The more genuine his expertise, the more productive his informational labour.

The global information base offers equal opportunities for excessive credulity and for checking the reliability of information. We respond in part to the filtration question (the separation of scientific knowledge on the Web from its imitations and substitutes) with technology, as in the fight against spam. However, it is still the human being working with information on the Web, and not the machine, that has the last word.

Once upon a time, at the dawn of the Enlightenment, the exchange of letters was one of the prime forms of scholarly communication. Now, with the development of the Internet, there is a sort of reincarnation of this form with the growing importance of many-sided conversations ('polylogues'), forums, distance conferences etc. What is more, it is becoming the normal form of *daily* communication for individual scholars and research groups working at a distance from each other.

In our opinion the role of the Internet as a field for work in the humanities and social sciences is still underestimated. Thus many tasks which are carried out by the traditional means of empirical sociology could be far more efficiently and economically achieved by means of controlled and random samples of material from the Net and its analysis.

It is to be understood that there is a very specific representation of the *socium* here. For example, so-called interactive surveys are known to create a false impression of the real correlations between social features and opinions. But it may be perfectly adequate for creating a typology of phenomena and processes and bringing to light the incipient tendencies of Internet use. Special corrective procedures are obviously needed to monitor the 'picture of the world' on the Net. At the same time, given a plurality of reflected images, aberrations may be in some way self-correcting.

I could sum up my answers to the questions asked by the journal by say that, being a product of the development of information science and technology, the Internet is becoming the prime global factor of that development.

Short questionnaire

I belong to the older generation (76 years old). The content of my professional work has not changed radically under the influence of the Internet, but its form and regime have.

IGOR ALIMOV

1

I do not agree that the boundaries of academic knowledge have changed, or that the former criteria for academic text have ceased to operate. In my undemanding opinion, the widening of informational fields has had no effect on the fundamentals of academic knowledge or of the scholarly text. The fact that one can find a serious scholarly text on an amateur site changes nothing: scholarship remains scholarship, and precision of knowledge remains precision of knowledge. It is another matter that the expansion of the informational field has made information as such extremely accessible, and in this sense, the processes currently underway in this field may be compared in their significance to the transition from roll to codex in book production. The statistical average number of educated people is evidently increasing as a result, and so it is a question of the quality of their education, that is, of the information which the users of the Internet — I am not afraid of the word — consume.

And here ‘materials that are difficult or impossible to classify in terms of the old categories’, as you rightly call them, are predominant, and this is greatly to be regretted. It is well known that real-life authority has no effect on the Internet, even though you were an academician three times over. It has its own special authorities, and these do not usually include people with genuine academic knowledge. The young people who make up the lion’s share of Internet users as a rule unfortunately lack firmly expressed criteria for evaluating the reliability of information and are glad to make use of the ‘diluted scientific information’ that is so freely available: all you have to do is switch on your computer and log on to the Net.

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Under these conditions many people will treat the suggestion of a visit to the library as a joke, and the decline in standards in Higher Education only encourages this sort of superficiality. Wikipedia, the free internet encyclopaedia, is becoming the ultimate authority of our age, even though anyone, no matter what his age, education or experience, can add or edit material in whatever way he sees fit. Clearly there is no question of academic knowledge here, and none of this has any relevance to scholarship.

What can the academic community do in such a situation? Practically nothing, I fear. Part of the problem is that serious scholars do not devote much time to the Web, which is understandable, as they have quite enough to do as it is. It would be ridiculous to require a scholar to make a martyr of himself to the Internet, and spend his time not on research but on unmasking militant ignorance, denouncing evident stupidity and engaging in endless debates with legions of anonymous net users who cannot even adhere to the most basic rules of politeness. As for the creation of specialised sites to which real scholarly information could be uploaded, for some reason this does not happen amongst us; evidently our esteemed nanotechnologists have not yet attained this level of achievement.

What I mean is, that this is a question not only for the academic community, but first and foremost for the nation, and it must be answered at a national level, because bare enthusiasm and the idea of bringing knowledge to the masses (which is all that the academic community can offer) is no answer to it. One cannot compel a scholar to look at the Internet, but one can provide the means for the regular and adequate publication on the Web of the results of research (even if only in the humanities), and this requires a certain expenditure of funds which only the state can afford — assuming, that is, that it understands the importance and necessity of such expenditure.

2

Whatever my opinion of the new forms of communication and organisation amongst the academic community might be, they are a *fait accompli*. So is the electronic book: it is true that I prefer the rustle of paper, but it would be stupid to deny the usefulness and convenience of the electronic format. They both have various consequences, including positive ones (such as the dissemination of knowledge). It is another matter that this knowledge must conform to certain standards of truth, and the electronic book to certain basic requirements of preparation before publication, such as editing and proofreading. I am sure that the Web cannot do without scientific clubs of one sort or another, where scholars can share opinions, argue and carry on discussions. You are right that the Web obviates the factor of distance, and a conversation which would have been impossible a little while ago for purely geographical reasons can now be pursued without difficulty. Furthermore, it is vitally important to

have such conversations, because it is no secret that the number of Russian specialists in various fields of scholarship is in serious decline.

But this sort of club must be semi-private, that is, there must be strict limitations on the scope of the ordinary user's participation, for example, to take part in conversations. By all means let him read, but let him not interfere. I am not in favour of students interrupting their professors, nor of cooks running the state.¹ But this is how the Internet looks at the moment, and Vasily Vasilyevich Pupkin² can come back from a fortnight's holiday in China and expound to all and sundry any and every question on all aspects of life in that ancient country as if he were an expert with an international reputation, not to mention teaching the language, which he mastered during the same two weeks. This is one reason why many serious scholars take no part in Internet life: it takes too great a toll of their time and nerves. And this is also a consequence.

3 Yes, the situation you describe is absolutely monstrous. Now and then you encounter such idiocies on the Net that your hair stands on end, and when you try to point them out, anonymous contributors ask: 'And who might you be?' For this reason I personally no longer point out any stupidity, because it is almost always pointless to do so, and life is too short. I use the Net as a sort of basic reference book which may (or may not) indicate more or less where the information is to be sought, after which I turn to sources known to be reliable, i.e. books. The Net can, however, help one to get one's bearings, but as a rule it does not provide reliable knowledge. One simply has to bear this in mind. (Obviously this does not apply to properly constituted Net libraries to which scholarly materials are regularly uploaded in citable form, in other words as pdf files that adequately reproduce their paper originals. Here there is no doubt that the Web is extremely useful, in that it allows one to find such sources of information, which are indeed invaluable.)

4 I can say nothing about this, and would prefer not to make anything up.

Short questionnaire

46 years old, the middle generation.

'To what extent has the content of your scholarly work changed under the influence of the Internet?' — Significantly. I now have access to various Chinese digital libraries, which for a modest fee allow me to download the most recent articles on subjects of interest to me in pdf format. For me personally this is a breakthrough.

¹ 'Under communism any cook will be capable of administering the state' — a very well known, though slightly misquoted phrase of Lenin's [Trans.].

² The Russian equivalent of Joe Blogs, but less respected than his English counterpart [Trans.].

YURI BEREZKIN

I shall answer all the questions together.

It seems to me that the influence of the Internet on scholarship has been greatly exaggerated. It is of course a great technical advance, which has made the work of collecting and manipulating information much more efficient than it was before. In the first place, the problem of access to reference materials has been eliminated. It now only takes a minute to find out whether the Bondo language is closer to Sora or to Juang, or the exact location of Mota Lava. Secondly, texts and images can be exchanged with colleagues or publishers almost instantaneously. This results in a colossal saving of time and effort. But, perhaps, nothing more.

The majority of publications providing initial research materials are not to be found on the Internet, neither freely available nor even on those sites which require a username and password. This probably depends on one's field of study, but only 1–2 % of the journals and books that I am interested in are accessible over the Internet. Therefore obtaining the literature remains the number one problem, as before. It is another matter that my friends and colleagues no longer have to photocopy the material for me, but can scan the text and send it by e-mail. But by no means everyone has the facilities for this.

It is understood that the difference between a scholarly and non-scholarly text is not where it is published, but what it contains. *Man* or *Anthropos* are established journals, not in any way electronic, but even they may contain all kinds of rubbish. However, I shall not discuss the question of what a 'scholarly text' is, because this has always been a live issue and has not direct connexion with the Internet. I do not see any dilution of academic knowledge. There are people whose opinions I trust more than others', but in any case facts are accepted not on the basis of opinion but on the basis of definite proof. I do not think that the Internet has had any effect on 'academic hierarchies'. The same

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applies to scholarly communities. These embrace people engaged in similar activities and holding compatible views, or at least not regarding each other as enemies. What has the Internet to do with this?

I am not sure that the field of information has become ‘unencounterable’. It has expanded to the extent that one can now communicate equally effectively with people on the other side of the world as with those in the same institution. But one could also do that before, by post. It is simpler now, and the circle of people with whom one does communicate is also wider, but not significantly. As for the various forms of collective ‘chat’, including those which are entirely academic, it has never occurred to me to waste my time on them. The same applies to ‘the explosion of materials that are difficult or impossible to classify in terms of the old categories’.

It is not possible to find the information that interests me in the Internet ‘field’, so that my opinion on this subject is of no value. It nevertheless seems to me that here too the Internet is nothing more than a technical device, a means of rapid contact with informants. It would only be possible to base research solely on communication over the Web if the virtual world were itself the object of the research.

Much has been said about the downsides and dangers of the Internet: children have stopped reading books, students download their essays and spend hours in virtual chatter without understanding that before information appears on the Internet someone has had to discover it. But this is the same as blaming hemp for the spread of drug addiction. Hemp is a useful plant, it provides fibres for rope and durable clothing, and if it is misused, that is not a question for botanists and farmers but for sociologists and politicians.

MICHAEL BURAWOY

Digital Worlds: How the International Sociological Association Is Using Electronic Media

As part of my election platform when standing as President of the International Sociological Association I made the commitment to introduce what I have called ‘Digital Worlds’. So far I have introduced the following <<http://www.isa-sociology.org/>>.

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— *Global Dialogue* (an open access magazine that appears 5 times a year in 13 languages)

- Universities in Crisis (ISA blog that deals with crises of higher education around the globe)
- Global Sociology, Live! (Open University that brings leading sociologists to viewers around the globe)
- Public Sociology, Live! (A global seminar bringing to global audiences public sociology conducted in different places, projects discussed by students around the world)
- Sociotube (Various films and videos made by members that details the everyday life of sociologists as well as great sociology speeches.)
- Institutes of Public Sociology (Building a network of engaged sociologies across the world)
- Facebook (Maintaining on-going contact with ISA members and friends of ISA)

The purpose of these ventures is not only to bring the ISA into the twenty-first century, but also to make our activities accessible to those who cannot afford to come to the conferences we sponsor — the Forum of Sociology and the World Congress. As well as including the excluded, it also keeps us in touch with our membership between our meetings. The idea is to keep our membership informed about what the EC does and to provide lively avenues of debate, and discussion. Let me explain what is involved in each of these projects.

1. Global Dialogue

The ISA had not had anything like a newsletter since Immanuel Wallerstein sent his 8 letters to the members 1994–1998.

The content of *Global Dialogue* includes:

- Debates about the nature of global, international sociology with position papers from leading sociologists.
- Interviews with leading sociologists
- Reports on ISA Conferences around the world
- Reports on ISA Journals
- History Corner by Jennifer Platt
- Human Rights
- Sociology at the UN
- Photo-Essays
- “Sociology as a Vocation” written by the famous sociologists of our planet

The translations are done by teams of young sociologists around the worlds that are brought together in this way to partake in as global discussion of sociology and its directions as well as bringing a socio-logical lens to the pressing issues facing the world. These young sociologists form the nodes in the development of a global community of sociologists.

2. Universities in Crisis

This was a project that emerged from the Taipei Conference of National Associations. It is a blog that has now gone live on the ISA website. It contains 71 reports from 40 countries. It needs to develop an editorial committee that will continue this important project — a project that becomes more important by the day as universities the world over are defunded, privatised, and/or state regulated.

3. Global Sociology, Live!

Here we use digital media to make globally available a course on global sociology that draws on distinguished sociologists from around the world, discussing global topics. It is organised from Berkeley, as a sociology course for undergraduates, and uses advanced video and teleconferencing technology. Each week a scholar gives a short lecture and is then questioned by students, who have previously discussed his or her work. Each program lasts 50 minutes. So far we have had the following conversations:

1. Michael Burawoy: *Introducing Global Sociology*
2. David Harvey: *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*
3. Michael Watts: *Oil, Dispossession and Violence in the Niger Delta*
4. Ananya Roy: *Poverty Capital in the Middle East*
5. Walden Bello: *Multi-lateral Organization, Their Past and Their Future*
6. Ching Kwan Lee: *Chinese Capital goes Global (Forthcoming)*
7. Sari Hanafi: *Crisis and Possibility in the Middle East (Forthcoming)*

This is still in an experimental phase in terms of content, format, technology. Various organisations in Berkeley are footing the bill. It is still an open question as to how we will take this forward.

4. Public Sociology, Live!

This is an extension of Global Sociology, Live! It is a global seminar bringing to global audiences public sociology conducted in different places, projects discussed with students around the world, discussions

summarised and posted on facebook and stimulating further discussion. The primary discussions are conducted on skype, then recorded and posted on the ISA website where they are watched by thousands of viewers, discussed in face to face seminars across the world. Summaries of these seminar discussions are then posted on facebook for further discussion.

5. Sociotube

The plan here is to produce short films of sociology in action. This could include films of conferences, such as the one produced by Annie Lin and Ana Villarreal on the Taipei Conference (2009) of National Associations. I am also hoping to start a series of videos on one day in the life of sociologists in different parts of the world. We have one so far — Esther Olivier from CREA, Institute for Overcoming Inequality, University of Barcelona. We must think how best to take this project forward.

6. Institutes of Public Sociology

There are a number of institutes, scattered around the world that are renowned for their engaged scholarship. The plan is to connect them to one another, bring them into dialogue with each other so that we can develop models of how they work, models that might be adopted and built upon elsewhere. We are starting with two institutes — CREA (Institute for overcoming Inequality, University of Barcelona) and SWOP (Institute of Work, Development and Society at the University of Witwatersrand). I am looking to build a list of candidates for the wider network, and so if you have suggestions let me know. I hope to have a conference at some point, and get each institute to write up exactly how they practice their sociology. There have been many debates about public sociology, now is the time to discuss how to practice it.

Facebook

To enhance two-way communication between EC and membership we have created a Facebook page for the ISA where we can report on a weekly or even daily basis on-going activities of the ISA and receive comments in return. Here we post the latest issue of *Global Dialogue*, the latest conversation on *Global Sociology*, *Live!* or *Public Sociology*, *Live!* and the latest addition to *Sociotube*. It is an organising center of ISA's digital worlds.

Conclusion

We can develop all sorts of digital worlds, but there is no surety that any one will be listening or watching. I would like to develop as many

of these as possible over 4 years in the hope that some of them will catch on. I'm hoping that our wide range of endeavors will have a synergistic effect, each promoting the others. If we don't try we will never know what potential digital media holds for the ISA.

While we can develop these projects and try to maintain them for the next three years, their longevity will depend on others taking on responsibilities for them, not just the present EC but beyond that. One direction is to cultivate a new generation of sociologists who have grown up with the new digital media. Thus, wherever I go I meet with junior sociologists, tell them about the ISA and its projects, gather their email addresses and try to recruit them for our projects.

In short, our *Digital Worlds* offer the following:

- As people see there is more to the ISA than attending the four-yearly Congress, or participating in RCs, so we could expand our membership.
- Through these projects we can begin to develop a greater sense of community and common purpose among sociologists across the world. It happens within the RCs and NAs but it can now happen throughout the ISA.
- We will be increasing participation in the ISA, and in particular we will be able to induct the next generation of sociologists for leadership positions.
- We will build a deeper and more open culture in which members will have access to what we do in the EC. There will be greater transparency and democracy.
- Finally, we will be able to project ourselves beyond our members to other sociologists, and beyond sociology to other disciplines and also to other publics. We will become far more visible, nationally and globally.

LARISA FIALKOVA

The Internet and the Story of my Academic Life

1 I think that the reliability of the formal criteria of the scholarly text has always been limited. In Russia, for example, it was articles in the metropolitan journals accredited by VAK¹ or in collections issued by the Academy or by certain universities that counted. The situation with

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¹ See above.

regard to conference proceedings was more problematical. It is with good reason that these have become known as ‘common graves’ amongst folklorists, even though the articles published in them are often just as interesting as those in journals. The nub of the matter is that it is those publications *where it is hard to get your work published* that were (and are) considered the best. I might add that it is particularly hard to get your work published there if you are an outsider. I have been through this process twice, one as a young literary scholar from Kyiv trying to get published in Russia, and then as an immigrant from the former Soviet Union in Israel, for whom being published in English in the West was a matter of survival.

Another criterion of the academic text has always been an extensive bibliography. There is moreover a silent convention that the author must cite those sources which the relevant academic community regards as important. Sources that are unknown to the editorial committee (for example, if they are published in a foreign language) may be ignored. One of my colleagues deliberately stopped citing sources in Russian, having noticed that their presence in the bibliography irritated the reviewers and made it harder to place an article in American journals. Another colleague had to defend herself against the accusation by the anonymous reviewer of a respectable German journal that she was citing ‘a certain A. Veselovsky, whom nobody has ever heard of’.

Another criterion was (and is) the language of publication. Russian was the language to be published in in the USSR, and publications in the languages of the other peoples who inhabited it were of manifestly questionable status. In Israel, articles published in English were unquestionably acknowledged as scholarly, whereas the quality of the rest was subject to doubt. Of course there were always people who published in ‘unrecognised’ publications and in ‘unrecognised’ languages, and there were always readers capable of understanding their worth. The criteria of ‘scholarliness’ were (and are) more important for the bureaucrats who decide on promotions. The criteria of scholarship that were already in existence before the Internet are well expressed in a joke that circulated in Israeli universities:

‘Is it true that God hasn’t got the chair?’

‘Of course! He doesn’t meet our high standards. Consider: he has only one publication, it isn’t in English, and it hasn’t got a bibliography. And besides, the experiment it describes is dubious, because no one has ever managed to repeat it.’

In the Internet Age it is well-known that one cannot decently cite Wikipedia, because the articles on it might have been written by anyone who felt like it, including schoolchildren. That of course does

not mean that there are no articles on it written by professional scholars. Consequently many people begin their search with Wikipedia, and then, without citing it, proceed to more ‘decent’ sources. In many cases the criterion of scholarship is the author’s name, the website where the work is published, and, last but not least, the text as such.

2

In the Internet Age, which has coincided with a shrinkage in the print-runs of printed editions, the criterion of accessibility of the source to its audience has changed. There was a time when anything published in the capital would receive a wide distribution. It would be easy to find and frequently cited. Now a publication issued by the Academy of Sciences in a print-run of 300–500 copies is still considered preferable, in terms of career progression, to an amateur website available to the whole world, but it will be less frequently cited, and, consequently, its influence on modern scholarship will be less.

Academic web communities are extremely important. They make it easier to exchange information about forthcoming conferences and miscellanies, newly published work and employment opportunities. In other words, they help you to survive in the academy. I can well remember how hard it was for me to find conferences and publish my articles at the time when I was writing my dissertation. At that time I was working as a bibliographer in an ordinary library in Kiev. My supervisor, Professor Yury Mikhaylovich Lotman, lived in Tartu and we used to meet about once a year. He had no telephone and disliked writing letters. He played a huge part in my work, but I had no opportunity for the sort of conversations in the corridors of the university where information of this sort is passed on. To paraphrase Lenin, ‘the circle of initiates was too narrow.’¹ And lack of access to information is a barrier that can only be overcome by immense effort. I used to hear of opportunities only afterwards, when it was too late.

To this day I remember with gratitude Professor Lev Sidyakov of the University of Latvia, who asked me, when I was complaining about the lack of information, ‘Why don’t you offer a paper for the conference at Daugavpils?’ I reacted with the speed of light. The conference was on my subject, and Professor Leonid Tsilevich accepted my paper even though the deadline for submissions was already past. This resulted in personal contacts, and life became easier.

Web communities mean that people no longer have to suffer like that. I now belong to several professional groups such as <h-soyuz@h-net.msu.edu>, <h-folk@h-net.msu.edu> and <seefa@lsv.uky.edu>.

¹ Lenin made this remark — about revolutionaries, not initiates — in his article ‘In Memory of Herzen’ [Trans.].

and the information about conferences and possibilities for publication which they send round are more than I could possibly cope with.

3

For me the Internet is more an extension of the library than a replacement for it. In principle nothing has changed if I read *Antropologicheskii forum* or *The Journal of Americal Folklore* in electronic form instead of as a journal borrowed from the library. The articles are the same, and are no less scholarly or authentic, but I am not required to return them by a given date.

4

I first saw the Internet as a 'field' after I had emigrated to Israel. The article that Haya Bar-Itzhak and I published on 'Folklore and the Computer' was published in a 'communal grave' in 1996 and languished in complete oblivion until it was exhumed by Mikhail Alekseevsky [Bar-Itzhak, Fialkova 1996]. I did some work in English amongst the members of the 'Ghost Stories' web group. The first reaction to the questionnaire was silence. Then I got a letter from one of the participants wishing to know whether the research had anything to do with the mental health of the group's members. He was evidently satisfied with my answer, since completed questionnaires began to come in immediately afterwards. I think that in the traditional 'field' also, dealings with an unknown interviewer may also be dependent on the agreement of the 'elders' or other trusted members of the group.

I cannot agree that the scholarly community has not given much consideration to the peculiarities of the Internet field, since there is an extensive literature on it (see, for example, [Alekseevsky 2010; Guseynov 2000; Blank 2009; Danet 2001; Fialkova, Yelenevskaya 2001] etc.).

I list here (without claiming to be exhaustive) a number of the characteristic features of the new 'field':

- the use of 'masks' and roles which make it impossible accurately to determine the sex and age of group members;
- the combination of elements of oral and written language;
- the change in the meaning of 'a small group', which is no longer necessarily connected with geographical proximity;
- the existence of a special system of signs (emoticons) which are intended to replace mimicry;
- the possibility for the 'ghosts' of members to visit the group from beyond the grave (in cases where their webpages are not removed after death, but remain on the web and can receive communications);

— the combination of ease of access with restrictions connected with privacy and copyright (and breaking these restrictions may result in being sued);

— the combination of the stability of the written text with its ephemerality (a text found yesterday may have disappeared today).

Work in the Internet field presupposes certain rules. Thus it is essential in all publications to cite the date on which a site was last visited, since it may disappear. When they were preparing my article on proverbs in medicine for publication, my colleagues at an Estonian electronic journal checked all the sites that I had cited [Fialkova 2010]. In the course of a year, two out of the six sites had ceased to operate. For the same reason it is essential to print out all the material collected. Thus in 2005 the sites that Maria Yelenevskaya and I had analysed in 1999 [Fialkova, Yelenevskaya 2001] no longer existed. At the ISFNR conference in Tartu in 2005 our announcement of this provoked a violent reaction from Professor Rolf Brednich, who had previously accepted our article for publication in the journal that he edits. He sent out a letter to all the conference participants pointing out that the disappearance of the material placed the reliability of our conclusions in doubt. Fortunately, we had printed out the material that we had used, and were able to respond on the same mailing list, saying that we were willing to place our archive at the disposal of anyone who wished to see it.

Another important rule to be observed, especially when working with blogs, is that one must get permission to use the blog from its owner, and his refusal carries the same weight as the refusal of an informant to be interviewed when approached face to face.

It is further recommended to combine different work methods, for example moving from Internet communication to the face-to-face interview. Thus Inna Weisskopf, whose coursework on Israeli Russian-language websites I supervised, took down oral interviews with the participants on the sites in parallel with her analysis of web materials.

Short questionnaire

To which generation of scholars do I consider myself as belonging? Probably still the middle one (if we remember the discussion on generations in *AF* No. 11). In my case the situation is really rather silly. By Russian standards I have reached pensionable age, since by the time this journal is published I shall be 54. But by the standards that prevail in Israel, where university lecturers, both male and female, retire at 68, I am still in the prime of life.

To what extent has the content of your work changed under the influence of the Internet? It has changed radically both in its subjects

and methods. Were it not for the Internet, many of my works would never have been written. This includes not only my articles about the web folklore community [Fialkova, Yelenevskaya 2001], or about the study of the Internet as a factor in maintaining the diaspora [Fialkova 2005], but also the case where it was the Internet that enabled me to find the different versions of the legend of the golden boat in the catacombs of Odessa [Fialkova 2007].

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IVAN GRINKO

1

I would not say that there was a direct connection between the appearance and evolution of the World Wide Web and a blurring of the edges of academic knowledge. One might just as well attribute the latter to the popularity of post-modernist philosophy or to the disappearance of the 'only correct ideology'. The example given in the questionnaire is essentially nothing but the classic example of quotations taken out of context, typical of a mass of pseudo-scientific works; but just being quoted by a certain 'expert on the racial question', does not prevent the works of D. N. Anuchkin or V. P. Bogdanov from remaining classical texts of Russian anthropology.

Naturally, unlimited access to information means that any sixth-former (provided s/he has not been banned from Google) can outdo a French *encyclopédiste*. However, this fact does no more than confirm the old truth that there is a big difference between a good scholar and a bookcase. The basic function of a scholar is not the accumulation, preservation and reproduction of information, but its structuring and the synthesising of new knowledge.

It is not so much a question of the blurring of the edges of academic knowledge as of the perception of those edges and of the authority of scholarship in the eyes of our worthy public. Armed with quotations from Wikipedia, one can now set about 'overthrowing accepted historical myths' and undertaking other 'socially useful activities' without having acquired even a minimal education in the humanities and social sciences. This is certainly a problem, but it is not a problem that concerns scholarship *per se* so much as the way scholarship has positioned itself. This is particularly acute for Russian ethnology (among others) because of the almost complete lack of decent popular scientific publications dealing with the methods and fundamental concepts of the discipline. However, this is a question that goes beyond the subject under discussion.

However, if we say that the Internet has exacerbated this problem, we must not fail to acknowledge that it has also provided a range of instruments for its solution: sites, blogs, conferences, all relatively cheap and simple means for the popularisation of science, so long as active use is made of them. Some steps are being taken in this direction, and one may already speak of a degree of success. The ‘S&T RF’ (Science and Technology in the Russian Federation) ratings of scientific blogs include two ‘journals’ dealing with ethnological subjects, and the ‘Proyekt Etnologiya’ group on the social network Vkontakte already has more than 10,000 participants, which is a very good result for a closed popular-scientific group. It is precisely in the field of the popularisation of science that the Internet offers the most interesting prospects, and they must be used.

It is another matter that there are not very many ethnological projects in the Russian-language segment of the Web, and those that there are, in my opinion, are not active enough. I would be reluctant to interpret this as a marker of the general situation within ethnology in this country, though this should not be entirely discounted. The problem is rather that it is very hard to cross the ‘thin red line’ between academe and real life. Sometimes this passage is made only formally, as by publishing a scholarly article on a blog. The effect in such a case is much less than it might have been.

2

Scholarly organisations of this sort are by no means new. ‘When work is to be organised and directed, there is no sphere in which public opinion plays such a vital and leading role as that of science. This explains why, as soon as scholarly activities begin to develop in any country, they immediately give rise to learned societies, academies and similar associations of scholars, which support the healthy growth of scholarship,’ wrote P. L. Kapitsa half a century ago [Kapitsa 1989]. If we remember the history of ethnology in Russia and abroad, we shall see that this discipline, like many others, owes its institutions to voluntary learned associations. Even now, the history of ethnology in Russia is held to have begun on 1 October 1845, the date of the foundation of the Russian Geographical Society, and nobody particularly tries to dispute it. Nor can one ignore the role of the Society of Devotees of Natural Sciences, Anthropology, and Ethnography, founded at Moscow University in 1864, in the development of Russian science. These two leading societies were by no means exceptional. Quite the reverse: they provided the model, and during the second half of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth a whole network of learned societies came into being across the Russian Empire. One might call to mind the Kazan Society for Archaeology, History and Ethnography (1877), the Archangel Society for the Study of the Russian North (1908), the Georgian Historical and Ethnographical Society (Tiflis, 1907) and the Jewish Historico-Ethnographical Society (St Petersburg, 1908), not to

mention the many branches of the Russian Geographical Society in different towns. By the beginning of the 1930s this self-reproducing structure had been almost entirely destroyed, but this does not by any means mean that it was not viable.

What is happening now is in many ways a repetition of the processes that took place over a century ago, but at a different qualitative level and using the most recent technology. The principles and forms, however, are essentially the same as before. An example of this would be the specialised site (or rather professional social network) 'Russian Anthropology: the Association of Physical Anthropologists of Russia'.

Considering that it was the learned societies that were the driving force behind the development of ethnology, one should hardly expect negative consequences from their current renaissance. One should not be afraid of their virtuality: they can fulfil their function of transmitting and popularising academic knowledge, and they are fulfilling it. That is not all they are doing. One must not forget that independent evaluation is also an important aspect of communication over the Web. Here we can quote Pyotr Leonidovich once more: 'It is only possible to unmask and rid ourselves of idlers, chatterboxes and pseudo-scholars with the support of public opinion' [Kapitsa 1989]. It is impossible not to agree with this proposition. The viability of ideas and theories, and, indeed the level of an individual's scholarship, can only be verified in the course of the day-to-day independent assessment of his work by his colleagues and ordinary lovers of the subject.

To sum up, one can only welcome the appearance of such societies, although they remain fewer than one might wish.

3

One gets the impression that there is no need to verify the authenticity of the printed text. The verification of sources has always been, and still is, one of the most important and most difficult tasks for anyone working in the humanities, and it is hard to see what new problems might arise from the fact that its format is now electronic.

Here, in my opinion, we must distinguish between two forms of information resource which the World Wide Web has made available.

The first consists of what one might call 'classical' works: sources, articles and monographs which have been digitised and uploaded to the Web. This 'class of merchandise' should not be greeted by professionals with anything but delight: access to information has become much easier, and above all, it increases the competition between metropolitan and provincial researchers, who used to work under completely different conditions depending on how close, or how far they were from their sources of information.

In addition, the evolution of Internet communication has solved the problem of so-called ‘grey’ or ‘invisible literature’. There is no longer any need to publish abstracts of papers from a small regional conference with a print-run of 100 copies, it is sufficient to put them on the Web, and they may find readers in less than a day. Still, in view of the average print-run of scholarly publications in Russia, one need not hesitate to assign them all to the ‘grey’ category, which means that the Web is their best hope. The same is true of the receipt of fresh literature from abroad, particularly periodicals.

There are besides a number of publications which it is very hard if not impossible to imagine in printed form. One example of these would be the *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* resource; another would be Yu. E. Berezkin’s analytical catalogue.

The second type of text consists of web sources of information, from blogs to Wikipedia articles. Checking their authenticity, as already stated, is no different in principle from the verification of other sources; the question is rather whether, given the volume of such resources, their verification is worth the effort.

In any case, confidence in this type of information source remains high, and they are more and more frequently used in scientific research [Samsonov 2009; Shchetinina 2009].

However, it seems to me that what is interesting is not so much the analysis of the texts themselves as an understanding of the structure of the various scientific and popular scientific web projects’ target audience and its field of interests. The majority of popular scientific texts used to be printed for ‘a wide range of readers’, that is, for no one in particular. Now we have the possibility of analysing the potential audience, its circle of interests, its persistent myths, and so on. This could be used to make popularising activities more effective. It could, accordingly, go some way towards solving the problem of how scholarship positions itself and the dilution of academic knowledge referred to at the very beginning.

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Short questionnaire

29 years.

Extent to which my work has changed under the influence of the Internet — considerably.

KATERINA GUBA

Between the Blog and Scholarship

Within the framework of this discussion on academic knowledge and the development of the Internet, I should like to touch on an aspect connected with what is happening to the art of finding one’s way around scholarship and to the status of academic knowledge. I shall try to draw a parallel between the academic world with its strict stratification and powerful institutional barriers, on the one hand, and the area of the sociological blogosphere with its free interaction and absence of any significant barriers to entry on the other.¹ In spite of all the differences between them, the academic world and the blogosphere are very similar: both spaces assume navigation between texts, which means a division of one’s limited attention between a potentially huge number of authors.

Here the opportunities of an author, particularly a sociologist, are quite limited: the time when it was possible to read all significant works is long past, and the flood of articles is ever increasing. In turn, the creation of a ‘friends page’ assumes a limitation of the field of attention through the final list of diaries. If the list of ‘friends’ is too long, it makes it harder to read their posts, so bloggers frequently engage in ‘friendocide’, reducing their friends list to a manageable size.

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¹ The analysis of the sociological blogosphere was possible not only thanks to my own experience of keeping a thematic diary, but also to research carried out with financial support from the RGNF under project No.10-06-00354a, ‘The Phenomenon of Trust in Public Internet Communication’.

And if the academic world puts up serious barriers to those who want to be heard by the academic community, the blogosphere offers this right to everyone. In this sense the virtual society of bloggers is — with a little imagination — one variant of the digital future for scholarship, and therefore the comparison of the organisation of attention and navigation in these two worlds is more appropriate than it might seem at first sight.

Although the Internet created a real revolution by overthrowing all the institutional barriers involved in the production of academic knowledge, the traditional academy has reserves of strength that will suffice for a long time yet. One of its main sources of strength is the evaluation of achievement on the basis of the residue of academic activity represented by books and articles. The adage ‘publish or perish’ refers to the need to publish constantly: ‘Correspondingly, it is through publication that scientists receive professional recognition and esteem, as well as promotion, advancement, and funding for future research’ [Fox 1983: 285]. The discovery of new knowledge must be appropriately rewarded, and it is made the essential condition for obtaining all the benefits offered by the academic world. Only it brings fame and recognition to a scholar, only it makes him stand out from the herd. This means that whether one’s ambition is to attain a major intellectual reputation or to pursue a career path within an academic organisation, one has to write texts.

The academic world sets up a series of institutional barriers through which a text has to pass in order to achieve the status of academic knowledge. This is what forms the demarcation between academic and non-academic knowledge, which in turn constitutes the fundamental delimiter of our attention. This is how we are freed from the huge amount of work undertaken by the institutions that licence academic texts, whether it be peer review of books and articles or the examination committee for a dissertation. We are generally inclined to believe what an author writes, and scandalous revelations of deceit occur too rarely to foster a culture of suspicion in scholarship. At the same time we can never be totally convinced that the author really has done his research and mentioned every single text worthy of attention in his work. If we took it upon ourselves personally to verify every text we came across, we should have no time to do any work of our own. Instead, we rely upon the institution of peer review, which saves us, if not money, then at least time and attention, in a manner analogous to following the advice of the critics who help people in ordinary markets to avoid buying bad cars [Gross 2000: 449]. When a journal publishes a scholarly article, it acts as a sorting mechanism [Klamer, van Dalen 2002], assuring the reader that the text possesses the required set of characteristics which indicate that it deserves at least some attention from the community. The activities of editorial committees and reviewers save people’s time, allowing them to

overlook the very bad texts which it would be a significant waste of time even to look at.

Naturally, the problem of navigation is not solved just by the existence of the institution of peer review, since there are too many scholarly texts, even within a single discipline,¹ for anyone to look at them all. Here the conditions for the limitation of attention take the form of vertical stratification, in which the best authors and best texts must be read first. The time spent on reading one's colleagues' work becomes an important resource which, being finite, we must spend as efficiently as possible. This last fact assumes that we should turn to the best texts and best authors and ignore those of lesser quality, which scarcely deserve to have any interest shown in them. The institutional infrastructure is constantly emitting signals defining who is who within the community. Here mechanisms of reputation come into play and allow the stratification of a vast number of academic texts. Mechanisms of this sort include the reputation of the author himself, and also that of the publisher or journal that has published his text.

Usually, journals published in major population centres enjoy a high reputation, expressed in the quality of the manuscripts which the editorial committee accepts for publication. The process of review in such publications makes considerable demands on the author, because the editorial committee is striving to maintain a high professional standard. The author therefore has a choice: either he can offer his article to a little-known journal, losing prestige but saving time and effort, or he can try to publish it in a leading journal for his discipline. The latter course will require greater expenditure, but in the end it will attract the attention of a significant number of his colleagues, which will make a palpable difference to the author's academic reputation [Oromaner 2008]. When we are looking for good authors, if we know that a given journal maintains high standards, we may hope not to find any 'lemons' (to use Akerlof's term²) amongst the articles it publishes.

At the same time, a scholarly text, even though published in a far from prestigious journal, may turn out to be quite important. The number of citations will indicate how much attention an article or author has received when it has become an essential element in the

¹ In the case of sociology this is made worse by two circumstances. On the one hand, the successful institutional development of Western sociology has enlarged the discipline to such an extent that it is impossible to keep track of all important publications. Under pressure to publish all the time, so as to achieve visibility within the community or promotion in the university, scholars are constantly organising new journals [Bott, Hargens 1991]. On the other hand, sociology is not a cumulative discipline, so that new knowledge does not represent a superior variant of existing texts, and we cannot therefore legitimately displace the old in favour of the new [Abbott 2008; 2006].

² Akerlof has borrowed the term 'lemon' for substandard merchandise from the used car market. He also give examples from the world of insurance, the financial markets and the labour market [Akerlof 1994].

ensuing discussion. In the end we find authors and publications which have become visible to a large number of their colleagues, while on the other side of the fence there are texts which have never had a single citation in their whole ‘career’. Reputational mechanisms of this sort are attractive not least because they may be expressed quantitatively as the impact factor of a journal and the number of citations received by an author or a particular text.

The vision that the academic world will evolve digitally, making texts available with open access, looks like a means of overcoming the institutional barriers which a text must normally pass through before it becomes academic knowledge. In such a case the struggle for a prestigious place of publication in one of the best journals would become a thing of the past. It would be possible to consult any scholarly text in an instant, and at the same time to find a place for one’s own results without any expenditure of time, emotion or money, and for many people this would represent real freedom in the academic world [Klamer, van Dalen 2002: 289]. However this state of freedom can also be seen as a destructive force capable of destroying the academic world to which we are accustomed. This is connected with the enormous increase in outlay when choosing the texts that are necessary for one’s own research: ‘Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention and a need to allocate that attention efficiently among the overabundance of information sources that might consume it’ [Simon 1971: 40–41]. Although a few clicks of the mouse are all that is needed to download hundreds of articles and books, the effort needed to select the most important and necessary of them would probably outweigh all the advantages of free access to scholarly texts.

Although a number of tendencies indicative of the approach of a virtual future for scholarship have manifested themselves, the new forms of communication and the new textual formats that accompany them are far from having become recognised elements of its institutional infrastructure. What they have done is to concentrate attention on what a scholarly publication actually is. The definition has concerned the actual format of the scholarly text rather than its content [Halliday 2001]. In this sense a failure to comply with one of the elements of the format may invalidate the text’s status as academic knowledge as effectively as errors in its content or breaches of academic etiquette. The list of the main points of the format of a scholarly publication points first and foremost to the stability of the text, which, once in the public domain, must be precisely identifiable and remain unaltered and accessible to the community. These, and other obligations (the retention of a system of peer review) should form an effective defence of the accustomed format of scholarly publications against the freedom of the digital future.

Most importantly, it seems, as long as scholarly publications remain the main source of academic achievement, the academy will be able to resist attempts to break through the boundaries of academic knowledge. This is what Abbott says in his lecture on the future of the system of scholarly publication: 'As long as the career system relies on peer-reviewed publication as its final measure of achievement, those publications — and if necessary the subsidies to maintain them — have to continue, one way or the other. [...] *Publication, that is, is merely about signals of achievement, not actually about communication.*' [Abbott 2008; our italics].

So, the academic world is highly stratified: the lower reaches of the hierarchy are firmly separated from its most prestigious levels. For example, the visible edge of American sociology, concentrated in the best universities and publications, exists beyond the limits of the periphery of the academic hierarchy. Prestigious departments are subject to a mild form of inbreeding, appointing each other's alumni, and the authors published in *ASR* and *AJS* cite each other's papers, creating a citation gap between themselves and the next best journal, *Social Forces* [Oromaner 2008: 287]. In this case stratification is maintained by a high entrance fee. One can understand its extent by imagining the usual academic trajectory of an author who has published an article in a top English-language journal or delivered a keynote address at a major conference. Sometimes one has to cover the whole road from beginning to end before people will really listen.

In this respect scholarly web communication in cyberspace, in the form of blogs for example, is organised completely differently. High academic status is not necessary to attract attention here. It is by no means obligatory (though it is frequently done in the Anglo-American sector of the blogosphere) to include a brief c.v. on one's blog. There is hardly any barrier to beginning professional communication: anyone can leave comments on any open journal, and there is no process of peer review to be gone through before anything is published. This means that writing an academic diary offers a unique opportunity to enjoy an inversion of conventional academic power [Walker 2007], when keeping a blog and engaging in discussion on it are possible without regard for the external context of real researchers from the academy. If we bear in mind on of the chief questions of the sociology of science, what is responsible for success (content or institutional correctness), communication in blogs is more inclined to the position of content being more important. Everyone has the chance of being read, without needing to have an outstanding c.v.

The different organisation of the field of attention is easily perceived when a person entering the blogosphere for the first time sets about searching for authors of good sociological blogs as possible places for discussion without a high entrance fee. In this case the creation of

one's own list of regularly read 'friends' — authors of thematic blogs — can take a long time, because the usual academic markers of prestige are unavailable for use as landmarks. There is no point in relying on special interest groups for this search: within a single community there may be entries about sociological events which other members of the community do not regard as legitimate, or even as sociological. The expenditure of effort in finding interesting diaries is really significant: it requires time spent on reading the diary in order to determine how far its subject matter corresponds to one's own preferences. In this sense it is essential to 'try out' a blog and have a look at its last ten or twenty entries. It is no exaggeration to say that the final selection involves a certain amount of work on the part of the blogger, because 'friending' implies subscribing to all future entries, so that a new diary occupies part of the blogger's attention, and therefore in the majority of cases the creation of a friends page is in reality the making of a selection.

However, it is only at first sight that the world of academic blogs appears to be a world consisting only of texts. Rather, it will so appear only to the novice, who sees unfamiliar nicknames each with a series of texts attached. It is true that the special institutional mechanisms of the academic world that take it upon themselves to license texts and assure that they reach a certain standard, thereby confirming the initial possibility of referring to it, do not exist here. With such freedom of choice, one must rely even more on the blogger's reputation as a writer of interesting entries, even if that reputation is not expressed quantitatively.¹ Most likely, in this case the process of choosing interesting authors will be like the sociological method of the 'snowball', when the discovery of one blog leads to the study of the comments on it and the author's friends page. This mechanism is based on the simple (but not always correct) premise that if someone is writing a good blog on the subject of one's interests, then he will be reading interesting people who write on similar topics. By analogy, friending is the same sort of public act (in terms of its results), as the inclusion of a bibliography at the end of an article. Just as looking through the lists of works by significant authors was for a long time one of the most important ways of finding the necessary texts [Abbott 2008], so an interesting author's choice of friends might considerably reduce the effort expended on a thematic search of academic blogs.

In such a case we entrust the selection to someone else. Our confidence in this selection arises from two factors.

First: adding the writer of another blog to one's 'friends' is a visible act: anyone can see any blogger's friends list. Even though the act of

¹ This is altogether probable in the case of thematic blogs, that is, those devoted to a particular interest. The volume of interest (the number of comments or the number of friends reading the blog) even for the most well-known authors is considerably less than for the top bloggers of the blogosphere as a whole.

friending by no means always indicates that there are any real connexions between the two authors, it is hardly likely that they would choose to make their mutual interest visible to the rest of the world if they occupied irreconcilable positions on particular questions or were members of factions that did not acknowledge each other's legitimacy. In the end, if the author of a thematic blog seems close in any of his convictions, there is a high probability that his 'friends list' will also be interesting. We must of course remember that in this case — unlike the editorial committee of a known journal — the blogger is under no obligation to meet our assumptions and expectations.

Second: the specifics of the Russian academic blog make it highly likely that both the reader and the writer of the blog are constantly obliged to determine the line of trust, sorting its readers according to which posts they are allowed to see. It is only at first sight that academic communication on blogs and communication in the real world appear to proceed along parallel lines that never meet. Even though in the first case academic status ceases to be a source of limitations, sometimes the whole chain of status markers is transferred to the blogosphere. And even if the blog is anonymous,¹ this anonymity is really a pseudo-anonymity, because with the passage of time it becomes possible to identify the person with a real academic figure. In this sense every author who keeps a blog about his research and academic life must solve the problem of proportion in the disclosure of public and private information about himself. Some choose in favour of discussing altogether public questions of professional life — academic events or political news. In blogs of this sort there is no manifestation of the emotional element, but even in this case it is necessary to take some decision about the force and intonation of one's remarks on the events of academic life. There are frequent instances in the sociological blogosphere when a public entry about one or other aspect of professional life has led to consequences going far beyond the realities of blogging.

The same question arises for those who add remarks of a personal character with a clearly expressed emotional intention to their posts: should such posts be regulated, and if so, who should be allowed to read them? A frequently used method is a 'lock' which allows the entry to be read only by those whom the author has added to his 'friends', who comprise the blog's constant readership. In this sense the reputation of the writer of a blog is more important than is the reputation of a scholarly writer in the academic world. When we add someone to our friends list, we allow him access to all previous 'locked' posts as well as all future ones. It may thus be supposed that

¹ In the Russian-language blogosphere it is typical that writers of sociological thematic blogs by no means always include personal information by which they might be identified in real life (data from members of the LiveJournal <sociology> community).

the observable act of ‘friending’ another blogger is a marker of the degree of trust that exists between bloggers. Consequently, if you trust one blogger, you may also, up to a point, trust the people on his friends list. Ultimately, if a correct selection of authors from a particular thematic sector has been made, this will considerably simplify any selection of interesting sociological blogs in the future.

The different ways in which attention is organised in the sphere of sociological diaries and the academic world does not mean that these two spaces are ultimately incompatible. For the time being we can observe a situation in which traditional social science with its measure of achievement in the form of published texts that have passed through its licensing procedures exists separately. The question remains whether academic communication is taking place through these articles and books, or whether it has been transferred to another field, which at first sight is supposed to do without a high entrance fee for participation in the discussion. The new means of communication really do suppose an absence of institutional barriers, but this does not at all mean that everyone will be heard. The main requirement for this is to write a significant text which will become a focus of attention for the virtual community.

Short questionnaire

Age: I am 25, so I consider myself one of the younger generation.

To what extent has my work changed under the influence of the Internet: it has probably changed very significantly, if one take into account not only its content, but also involvement with significant networks of sociologist to a large extent via on line contacts.

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VLADIMIR ILYIN

The Internet as a Parallel Space for Research

Scholarly activity is a two-sided participation in the flow of information. On the one hand, researchers draw information from those currents of it that make up the real world and process it, and on the other they pour their own information, processed to one degree or another, back into the same currents. Only the second of these activities makes the potential researcher into a real researcher who has demonstrated not only efforts, but results. Scholarship is a form of interaction which forms and perpetuates a particular type of social identity.

The Internet is a new, parallel space for communication, from which the researcher may not only draw information, but in which he may also place his empirical data and theoretical models. Naturally, the appearance of the Internet has created potential for radical change in the conditions of academic work. A parallel society comes into being. But possibility is not automatically translated into reality. It is not enough to have it, one must be able to use it. The result is a restructuring of the academic community: there are some who have found their place in the new dimension, others who have yet to notice it, and in between, an intermediate type who use the Internet sporadically in its most primitive forms (e.g. e-mail).

The Internet as a space for open scholarship

In the traditional dimension of scholarly communication it is less important what was said than who said it (rank and position) and where (in which journal, at what conference, etc.). The borders of academic discourse are strictly guarded not only by discursive means (specialised language, the knowledge base of the discipline without which the texts cannot be understood, etc.), but even by entirely physical barriers: the porters will not admit non-participants to the building where the conference is taking place, the session chairmen will not invite just anyone to speak, the editors select the authors and edit their texts, and the high prices charged for academic books and journals also deter the inquisitive. In this way non-participants are socially excluded from the academic discourse.

The Internet breaks down the physical means of social exclusion (except for that of access to the Internet itself), leaving only internal filters, i.e. the capacity to understand the contents of the discussion. But at the same time anyone can intervene in the academic conversation and express his opinion, often in defiance of traditions of which he is unaware and in ignorance of academic axioms and facts. This means that scholarly discourse on the Internet is open to those whose knowledge is of everyday matters, but who have their opinions on the majority of scholarly problems ('I haven't studied it, but I can say...'). People who choose to look at a topic from the point of view of a particular religion, ideology, politics, astrology or even the author's ethnicity ('What can you expect of a man with a name like that?') find it easy to join in the academic discussion. A Zenit¹ fan or a skinhead, who have their own opinions on ethnological questions, can intervene in a discussion of the social construction of ethnicity. This kind of Internet democracy scares away many scholars, whose 'armour' of degrees and professional appointments is ineffective here. An academician may well read that he is 'an ignorant fool'. This unsupervised mixture of discourses leads many specialists to the conclusion that the Internet is a 'rubbish dump' which there is no point in entering.

However, this discursive chaos has contradictory consequences. On the one hand it is irritating and illogical, tending towards the infringement of the traditions and rules of debate accepted in a given academic community, and frequently, indeed, taking an academic topic beyond the bounds of scholarship. On the other hand, this chaos may be a manifestation of a fruitful interdisciplinarity, to which all doors are open on the Internet.

Moreover, the blurring of the edges of scholarly discourse on the Internet, thanks to the intervention of common knowledge and

¹ The St Petersburg football club. [Trans].

common sense, forces researchers in the humanities and social sciences to conduct their discussions not only in the hothouse conditions of their departments and conferences, but also engage directly with the motley and multifaceted society that is the object of their studies, and find a common language with those who, though formally remote from the discipline, are nevertheless the potential consumers of its output. As a certain famous practitioner of classical Marxism¹ once remarked, one cannot live in society and be free of society.

In other words, the Internet undermines the tempting formula ‘scholarship for scholars’, which is only possible when they have guaranteed funding without unnecessary irritating questions of the sort ‘who needs it?’ from politicians, bureaucrats, journalists and the public at large. The logic of democratisation means that the fruits of social science must be acknowledged by members of society who are for the most part without any special education in that sphere. The need for public sociology, public history, ethnology, anthropology, etc., is becoming more and more acute. If they do not establish two-way communication with society, society may well exclude them from the budget of the state, the Academy of Sciences, the university, the school, etc. And a tendency to reduce state support for the humanities is already in evidence.

However, the possibilities for interactive scholarship on the Internet are as yet limited. The commonest way of presenting scientific results is by uploading books and papers to websites. There are also videos of lectures. But this format informs without discussing, without communicating. True, researchers are more and more beginning to keep blogs that afford the technical possibility of interaction. Their format is not, however, intended for large, complex texts and extensive discussions. Meanwhile, serious journalism has already made the transition from information to communication: every article on a web edition offers the possibility for any reader to ask a further question, express his opinion and counter-arguments, link to his blog or to other sources, and so on. It is evidently time to put academic books and article on the Internet in the same sort of format. This will help to overcome the monologue that is the prevailing format for the social sciences in our country: the author writes, and someone else reads, but hardly ever tells him what he thinks of it. The status of the occasional printed review is unclear: the publisher may have commissioned it in order to promote his product, or the author’s friends have responded to his call, or else it is the work of his enemies.

It seems to me that *Antropologicheskii forum*, which has one of the best electronic versions of any academic journal published in this

¹ Lenin. [Trans.].

country, could become an actual forum, and not a limited platform for invited participants, by providing a mechanism for writing comments on every article. This could be a model for other academic journals. There are no technical obstacles to this, since the majority of newspapers and socio-political journals have long ago adopted an interactive regime.

Revolution in librarianship and publishing

The Internet, as a space for scholarly communication, is generating a devaluation of traditional paper publications. The older generation has not yet noticed this, but amongst students there is a growing number of people who pick up an ordinary book or journal only when there is no alternative. For them a text which has not been uploaded to the Internet does not exist. This generation is not making the weather in scholarship yet, but very soon it will inevitably supplant the bearers of the culture of the printed word. The appearance of e-books has demolished the objections to electronic text that it is 'inconvenient', 'tires the eyes', etc. This is already the format of the modern book, similar in appearance to an ordinary one, much more convenient than a computer, and contains a whole library of thousands of volumes within an ordinary briefcase. It can be read on the underground, in the park, standing in a queue, and so on.

Quite a serious alternative network of libraries, both open (free) and closed (requiring a subscription), has developed on the Internet, and this is competing more and more successfully with traditional libraries, effacing the distinction between the capital and the back of beyond. Whereas the usual serious academic libraries of Russia are only accessible to the inhabitants of Moscow and, to a markedly lesser extent, St Petersburg, electronic libraries are potentially available to anyone with Internet access.

Thanks to the Internet anyone can have a library at home, open at any hour of the day or night, and issuing for unlimited periods books which, thanks to the e-book, may be read anywhere. This is the beginning of a real revolution in librarianship, though most libraries in our country have yet to understand it.

There are, however, serious obstacles to this library revolution, not of a technical, but of a social nature. Traditionally paper editions have a far higher status than electronic ones (when, for example, one is writing a report of one's research activities, defending one's dissertation, etc.): the chief academic administrative positions are still occupied by people from the paper twentieth century. This makes authors strive to get their books and articles published on paper. As a result they share their copyright with the publishers, who unlike the authors are interested not in the dissemination of information, but in profit.

Scholarly books have small print-runs and high prices, so that they are hard to obtain, and in many parts of the country totally unobtainable. The conversion of a book to electronic format and its distribution over the Internet is blocked either deliberately or out of ignorance by the marketing department, in order to force the reader to buy expensive (sometimes incredibly expensive) paper editions, often blaming the author's copyright. As far as the market for academic books, is concerned, this is generally no more than a ruse, as the author receives only a token payment or none at all. Copyright is thus turned into a mechanism for exploiting scholars, and at the same time prevents the author from reaching a wide audience.

The market for scholarly literature in electronic format in Russia is only just beginning. For the most part, scholarly literature is distributed over the Internet by the spontaneous efforts of the authors themselves, or of student 'pirates'. At the same time publishers, who have a monopoly over the copyright, usually put high prices, on a par with paper hardback copies, on electronic books, even though their cost price is very low (since there are no printing or transport costs, and very little expenditure on retailing them). The majority of scholarly books issued by large publishers are not placed on the Internet, and paper copies are sold a high price in a small number of bookshops in the capital. Books issued by small institutional presses do not as a rule reach the retail market (in the whole country there are only a few tiny bookshops that have their products offered for sale). The result is a mountain of unsold books issued in tiny print-runs, the perfect illustration of 'publication for publication's sake'. In this way modern academic publishers, stuck in the paper age, are by their conservatism holding back the development of new forms of academic communication.

This preference for paper is also in the social interests of many academics, who are afraid of other people getting their hands on their work. They publish their books and articles in small print-runs and deliberately avoid the possibility of the distribution of their results even within the academic community. How many holders of advanced degrees there are in Russia whose monographs have never been seen by anyone! Putting all these works on the Internet would reveal the true nature of many an emperor's new clothes. It is natural that traditional paper has many defenders.

The normative documents of VAK,¹ which recognise only paper publications, play a similar conservative and obstructive role. In this instance VAK is holding scholarly communication back, forcing outdated forms upon it. The criteria for assessment of scholarly

¹ *Vysshaya attestatsionnaya komissiya*, the Higher Attestation Commission, responsible for awarding higher degrees. [Trans.].

activities which are being introduced in universities and academic institutions place great emphasis on publication in 'VAK-approved' journals. The result is a conservative vicious circle.

One of the key criteria for inclusion on VAK's list of journals is a large paper print-run, which automatically increases publication costs for academic periodicals. The existence of a vast number of paper copies when there is no national system for their distribution and when libraries are so underfunded feeds a naive attempt on the part of many publishers to avoid producing electronic versions or at least to produce them after a long delay, when there is clearly no hope of selling off the backlog of paper copies.

What can be done to overcome this situation?

First, some procedure must be developed to equalise the status of paper and electronic publication, and, moreover, in view of the greater openness and accessibility to scholarly criticism of the latter, they should play a greater part in the accumulation of a researcher's cultural capital.

Second, universities and academic institutions should set up non-commercial publishers particularly engaged in electronic publication on the Internet and with the sole purpose of maximising the dissemination of their results, which will have the commercial side-effect of branding the universities in question.

Third, academic journals should divest themselves of the burden of printing costs and make the transition entirely to electronic publication. It is much easier for libraries and individuals who for one reason or another must have a paper version to print off an issue or individual article than to subscribe to a paper journal. Academic journals on paper are an anachronism, and attempts to make them profitable are an illusion that stands in the way of the dissemination of the results of research. The need to remove these barriers is particularly acutely felt in our country, where it is a rare library that can afford to subscribe to all the journals that it ought to have.

Web organisation of research

The Internet is opening up opportunities for new ways of organising research, so that separate researchers or research groups in different parts of the country, or even different parts of the world, can take part on a permanent basis. I can illustrate this with the example of the Institute for the Comparative Study of Labour Relations, which successfully functioned as a highly web-based organisation for fifteen years or so (beginning in the early 1990s). The director of the Institute, the administrator and the office were in Moscow; the Academic Director was Professor Simon Clarke of Warwick University

in England. From the beginning the institute had small regional branches in Moscow, Syktyvkar, Kemerovo, Novokuznetsk and Samara, which were later joined by groups from Ulyanovsk and Ekaterinburg. Individual projects saw the inclusion of groups and individuals from Georgia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kirgizia. There was a brief experiment of including sociological groups from China and Vietnam in the research network.

Such an institute could not exist without the Internet. The basic outlines of the research programmes were worked out beforehand during short personal meetings at seminars, after which the completion of the research mechanism was basically conducted by e-mail. The fully developed and agreed mechanism was provided to every group. As a result the research proceeded in parallel using the same methods (predominantly using qualitative methods) in different regions of Russia and Eurasia. The regional groups worked in accordance with a predetermined plan. The field material obtained was distributed over a closed network, databases were assembled on closed websites, and on the basis of this each participant was able to write books and/or articles on his chosen subject. The results of each project — both provisional and final — were discussed at seminars, and the final materials (articles, papers, and in part the field material) were displayed on the Institute's website, which was developed at Warwick University and open to all researchers with an interest in the field. A parallel site was constructed in Russian.

Thanks to this site the Institute was periodically visited by students of labour relations from other academic institutions in Russia, Britain, Germany, the USA, Canada and other countries. From time to time they co-operated in particular research projects and participated in the Institute's seminars. The overall number of participants in the web project was sometimes more than fifty, with a nucleus of about twenty.

Within this web institute, and with the financial support of European grants and Warwick University, a large number of monographs and collections of articles were written and published in Britain and Russia, separate articles regularly appeared in the learned journals of both countries, not a few researchers completed their PhD dissertations in England (or candidate's dissertations in Russia), three people took higher doctorates in sociology and economics, and a number of people who started out as junior field workers in far-flung regions of Russia are now heads of department at the Higher School of Economics National Research University or work in various British universities.

In recent years there has been a significant expansion in the technical possibilities for achieving more flexible and active forms of scholarly communication over the Internet, which opens up further possibilities for web-based projects and institutes.

Fieldwork on the Net

The Internet is a parallel social space that generates its own information. The result is the formation of a parallel research field of no less significance than traditional ‘reality’, but with its own specific features, possibilities and limitations.

I shall mention only a few research methods which I have successfully tried out over recent years. I used LiveJournal <www.livejournal.com> as a research platform during research into the social structuring of everyday life amongst young people in big cities in Russia (2004–2007). Here I created a blog called ‘Strannik’ (former nickname ‘vr05’, new nickname ‘0_stranger’), from which I monitored texts on the subject under investigation. The blog architecture permits toggling between active and passive regimes. For example, there might be an interesting journal or post within the LiveJournal space. Through the comments regime it is easy to switch from passive reading and processing of someone else’s text to an interview: the author is asked questions which direct his remarks into the logical flow of the investigation. Furthermore, the regime of remote communication via LiveJournal allows one to discuss with a stranger topics which in the real world might be considered ‘closed’ or ‘too intimate’. Regular comments can prompt selected bloggers to observe life taking the research programme into account. Also, communication via LiveJournal made it possible to collect information about the lives of people living in a different city.

In the same research, the LiveJournal space was used to find informants for traditional in-depth interviews. Requests for interviews were sent to individuals already relatively well known thanks to their blogs in those cases where the comment format was no longer sufficient. As a result the boundary between the two fields — Internet and real life — was on occasion significantly blurred.

The same research made use of specialised forums where I was able to intervene with my questions. This produced quite extensive information with minimal effort. The final outcome of the research was the publication of a book on *The Life and Being of Young People in the Big Cities of Russia: the Social Structure of an Incipient Consumer Society* (*Byt i bytie molodezhi rossiiskogo megalopolisa: sotsialnaya strukturatsiya formiruyushego obshchestva potrebleniya*, SPb., 2007).

I made active use of the Internet as a field during my research on ‘The Everyday Life of the American Consumer Society’, conducted in the country districts of the southern United States in 2008. After having been interviewed several times by local journalists, I received numerous offers of help in conducting the research from Americans

living in various places and belonging to various social groups. Our main means of communication was e-mail, by means of which I explained the purpose of the research to my potential informants and then arranged to meet them. After the usual in-depth interview I often had further questions which I sent to my informants by e-mail. Sometimes these supplements were greater in volume than the interview itself.

The websites of American newspapers and magazines became an important information source for me. I was interested not only — often no so much — in the articles, as in the numerous comments on them made by active readers. Often, when a controversial topic was discussed, a small article could be accompanied by hundreds of comments from very different social strata, which provided material which would not have been obtainable by traditional fieldwork.

In organising this research, as in the previous instance, I made use of social networks, mostly Myspace. My work with the informants was co-ordinated over this network, and I also used it to ask supplementary questions. In addition, the blogs were used as a valuable source of texts and visual materials about the social organisation of the everyday life of (mostly young) Americans.

Further opportunities for fieldwork on the Internet are provided by Skype. The fact that it is cheap, and the ever improving quality of the connexion, mean that there is ceasing to be any difference between the traditional interview and a conversation on Skype. The only real limitation on the use of this technology is the technological backwardness of most of the inhabitants of Russia. However, when working with young people or the more progressive elements of the adult population, Skype is already an effective fieldwork tool. It is particularly useful for work with remote informants or experts.

The technical possibilities are also available to conduct focus groups on the Web, including people from any region, so long as they all speak the same language. This technology is already actively used for marketing and allows considerable economies of time and money. There is no real obstacle to transferring this technology to sociology and anthropology.

Obviously, research on the Web and using the Web cannot be universal. It all depends what is being studied. Even in the most advanced nations one can often observe a clear social stratification in the extent to which people are involved in the virtual parallel dimension: some people some spend more time there than in the real world, some use the Internet for purely ancillary purposes and only occasionally, and some are excluded from it altogether, not understanding either what it is for or how to use it. The relative dominance

of these strata varies markedly from country to country. In Russia, as before, the majority of the population, particularly outside young people's groups, is unreachable over the Internet. Nevertheless, the situation is changing noticeably every year.

Summary

The Internet is thus a parallel space for academic communication of growing significance. Its appearance poses many questions that require a radical reorganisation of scholarship as a social institution and of the methodology of fieldwork. The Internet is a new field which is attracting an ever larger number of researchers.

MIKHAIL KRASIKOV

1

I do not believe that 'the appearance of a boundless field of information has led to a situation where the boundaries of academic knowledge have become not only indistinct, but different in nature.' If we consider its origins, in both the European and the Oriental traditions academic knowledge was from the beginning **integral** and **syncretic**. Not only did Aristotle, the encyclopaedic mind of antiquity, study *everything*, but so did sages of a much lesser calibre. Moreover, this was *all* called **philosophy**. There simply were no demarcation lines between branches of knowledge (which had not yet become, or were only starting to become *offshoots* from the single Tree of Knowledge, that is, 'sciences'), and this was in itself a source of innovations, creative ideas and bold syntheses, since it was evident that **everything was connected with everything else in the Universe**.

Lomonosov was still an encyclopaedist; V. N. Karazin (1773–1842), the founder of Kharkov University, known to his contemporaries as 'the Ukrainian Lomonosov', had an astonishing breadth of scholarly interests, but it is no accident that by the middle of the nineteenth century the possibility of encyclopaedic knowledge in a single individual had become subject to doubt, albeit tempered by an ironical attitude towards specialists, the extent of whose knowledge is always like a gumboil — one-sided

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(Kozma Prutkov¹). The present age is not the age of encyclopaedists, but the age of narrow specialists (though even today one can encounter scholars with a breadth of outlook worthy of the Renaissance — ‘a tailor and a reaper and a piper all in one,’ as the peasants used to say). And however sarcastic one might be about the way specialists know more and more about less and less and will soon reach the point where they will know everything about nothing, narrow concentration within a subject is by no means always senseless: an extremely restricted topic of study is not at all the same thing as a restricted mental horizon. There have been instances (and there have been instances in folkloristics and ethnology) when a profound and many-sided study of some ‘trivial’ detail has improved our understanding of a whole range of problems.

Nevertheless there was a distinct tendency in the second half of the twentieth century towards a ‘meeting of disciplines’ and a form of syncretism (at a new stage) of scholarly knowledge. There was even a concept of ‘knowledge outside the subject’. And this was all before the Internet!

I cannot agree that ‘the former criteria for scholarly texts are ceasing to operate’, either. For any serious scholar, the criteria of the ‘scholarliness’ of a text in the humanities remain the same: a sound factual basis, strictly documented sources of information, suitable research methods, logical and uncontradictory exposition, a full grasp of the material, awareness of all previous research into the subject, precise and profound analysis, objectivity and well-founded conclusions. If someone finds that these criteria have ceased to operate, then he is no longer engaged in scholarship. It is unfortunately the case that over the last twenty years there have been not a few examples of people, even those burdened with academic posts, writing ‘popular scholarly works’, in particular about Slavonic paganism, on the basis of extremely dubious sources. But the Internet has nothing to do with the appearance of these texts either, except for their distribution. Yes, ‘a serious academic text may be encountered on an amateur website’, though more commonly on someone’s personal website (when it is important for a person to make public an article published in a collection that is hard to get hold of); this is done by many scholars, including the writer of these lines. But ‘*vice versa*’ — an amateur text on a scholarly (genuinely scholarly!) website — that is impossible, or if it does happen, it calls into question the editors’ competence.

I see nothing wrong with ‘the explosion of materials that are difficult or impossible to classify in terms of the old categories’. There is such

¹ The pseudonym under which between 1853 and 1884 Count A. K. Tolstoy and the brothers Aleksey, Aleksandr and Vladimir Zhemchuzhnikov published a series of aphorisms and other humorous material that are still very popular in Russia today.

a genre, for example, as **the scholarly and philosophical essay**: this sort of text does not fit into the framework of ‘strict academic knowledge’ (thank God!), but the genre has existed for centuries in the humanities, and is now undergoing a renaissance, so that there are even occasional competitions for the best composition of this sort. This is logical: free expression of thought may be a vigorous stimulus to academic study, expanding the very perception of the problem. But such ‘materials that are difficult or impossible to classify in terms of the old categories’ exist both in electronic and printed form. They do not threaten to ‘dilute academic knowledge’: their authors, after all, are often people who know the ‘rules of the game’ in the academic community perfectly well, and are at the same time writing texts of an entirely ‘classifiable’ nature, i.e. completely scholarly articles and monographs. Things that are classifiable and not need each other equally (and are necessary to scholars and scholarship), on the lines of Niels Bohr’s principle that opposites are complementary.

2

Yes, the Internet does provide new possibilities for organising academic life. Web-conferencing is a day-to-day occurrence, and at conferences in the ‘real world’ it is more and more frequent to communicate with an overseas colleague via Skype (hear him read his paper, ask him questions, engage in discussion). But is the division into ‘metropolitan’ and ‘provincial’ communities disappearing? It seems that everyone is equal on the Web, as they are in the bathhouse. But in reality there is no equality in the bathhouse, nor on the Web (nor indeed anywhere else!). Schools attached to traditional scholarly institutions are still authoritative. The former hierarchies do not become irrelevant, but **alongside them** there arise Internet communities, where (particularly on forums) one can find new information, exchange opinions on particular questions, ask for help in discovering the required facts, and so on. This makes life easier, but it does not change it radically: there is no substitute for work in archives and libraries, taking part in fieldwork, etc. As Raykin¹ said, ‘There are some things that you have to do for yourself.’ Yes, certain categories of informant can (and should) be surveyed using modern information technology, but the people who follow a traditional lifestyle in the former Soviet Union have not yet provided themselves with PCs, nor do they hang about internet cafés.

The real value of the Internet for scholars is that it allows them to keep up with the literature as it appears (and this is true whether they work in the capital or in the provinces), and moreover order the books they need from on-line bookshops. The electronic catalogues of major libraries are very convenient to work with (although, alas, they do not yet contain all the riches of our repositories). Archives

¹ Arkady Raykin, Soviet actor and satirist [Trans.].

too are providing more and more opportunities for the researcher to find his way around their holdings without leaving the house (although again, by no means all archives, not even academic ones, yet have electronic guides to their holdings).

As for the bibliography of one's chosen subject, one should not deceive oneself: the Internet is by no means omniscient, and there is a vast quantity of specialised publications, old and new, that escape the invisible net, so that only third-rate scholars will rely on it *exclusively*.

3

There are two extremes that must be avoided:

- a) total confidence in the Internet;
- b) total lack of confidence in the Internet.

The governing principle here, as in scholarship in general, must be 'trust but check'. It is one thing when the website of a learned society or individual scholar includes an article or monograph (sometimes in the form of a scanned copy, which is the equivalent of its printed original). It is quite another matter when an article, borrowed anonymously, begins to wander round the Internet, deprived of its author's name, its notes, its illustrations, and sometimes of whole paragraphs, but acquiring a new title, false dates, and suchlike. I have more than once discovered my own texts reduced to such a condition on the Internet, and then reprinted under a different title in popular editions without mention of the author's name (let alone any remuneration).

I always verify the authenticity of downloaded information. Sometimes I need to get in touch with the author, which I do (again, over the Internet). And I regularly swap articles with my friends by e-mail, often before they are published in a periodical or collection, that is, we get our information 'at first hand'.

4

One of my own articles is on this subject [Krasikov 2009].

There are scholars, such as Maria Akhmetova, Irina Nazarova, and Mikhail Alekseevsky, who do brilliant work in this new 'field'. There are certain topics that can be studied 'immanently', without leaving cyberspace. In order to study subcultures today, say, it is not enough for the researcher to 'hang out' with members of the group in question: the virtual life of the community must also be studied. And, as we know, there are subcultures, like the *padonki*,¹ which exist exclusively or predominantly on the Internet. Of course, the Internet offers wide opportunities for hiding behind a 'verbal mask'. But the Internet folklore of programmers, for example, would be incapable of existence in a purely oral form. It would indeed be interesting to compare the quantity and quality of programmers' jokes, stories,

¹ *'Podonki'*, literally 'dregs of society' in 'Olbanian' spelling (see note 6), a favourite self-designation of those who use it. [Trans.].

parodies, burlesques, etc. circulating in the oral tradition (as in the old days) and in cyberspace.

No investigation of the self-expression of the denizens of the World Wide Web should ever forget that every *Homo interneticus* also has a real life, and Internet discourse, important though it may be, is not his only discourse, which means that the whole arsenal of the traditional methods of cultural anthropology should also without fail be brought to bear on the work.

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ROMAN LEIBOV

1 Strictly speaking, the way out is perfectly obvious: Web space, like any other cultural space, must be organised, and by us, not left to other people. If we move from a passive to an active position, we may envisage a prospect not of 'further dilution' but of 'restructuring'.

However, the problem is complicated by the fact that the tendency described in the question is not at all a consequence of the rise of the Internet and by no means only characteristic of the last fifteen years.

For decades now it has only been those who cannot be bothered who have refrained from mocking the quality of articles in the 'major' English-language refereed humanities journals. We too are very familiar with this situation from the Soviet period, when some provincial journals had more weight than the *Review of...* or *Journal of...* published in Moscow.

It seems that this situation has nothing to do either with the Soviet regime or with the Internet, but is a direct result of the ambiguity of humanities knowledge (including here the social sciences in their wider sense) in the post-positivist system of scholarship.

We should therefore now take a hard look at the experience of our colleagues in linguistics, and

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also natural scientists and mathematicians. Some thought has already gone into this.

2 I wholeheartedly welcome any possible new ways of organising the scholarly community, provided they lead to meaningfulness. There would seem to be no doubt about this: if the slightest thought goes into the rules of the game, they will be enough to prevent an inrush of lunatics and hooligans, and the hierarchies operating in the new areas of communication, which I have had the pleasure of watching grow up in my own field, correspond perfectly to my own ideas of the present structure of the world of the academic history of Russian literature.

Incidentally, colleagues who 'do not take part in scholarly web communication (not counting e-mail)' often demonstrate in their e-mails a high degree of awareness and involvement in other forms of communication.

That is simply the form of it that they have chosen.

3 In the same way as I used to in the library: by grading my sources. Yes, there is a lot that has to be explained from scratch, but those who are older or the same age as I understand it all quickly and without being told, and we have always had patiently to explain to the young the difference between a book with the heading 'Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Institute of Russian Literature' and one with the series title 'My First Books', or how to use the subject catalogue.

I would say that new possibilities create new difficulties, but they also sharpen the investigative instinct, which is useful when operating in an informational no man's land.

4 First it must be pinned down in the most elementary manner. This is the primary problem of web sources as an object. You work up a sweat typing out a long URL out of a printed book, so as to see the context of a quotation used in the research, and all you get in reply is the lapidary '404 Not Found'.

For this purpose we have a fairly simple project for a research archive, and there is even quite a detailed technical specification for anyone who takes it into his head to take on the project and find the necessary programmers to develop it. Only we have no funding for the project, still less do we have the time to look for any. (Evidently because I am not a folklorist, nor a sociologist of literature, nor a political scientist, not a psychologist, and not even a linguist. Otherwise I would have.) If anyone is interested, write to <ruth@tartu.msk.ru>.

Short questionnaire

Age — 48.

How far has your work changed under the influence of the Internet — considerably.

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Internet — Folklore — Folkloristics

In Russian folkloristics, as elsewhere in the humanities, the Internet is firmly established not only as a means of preserving and transmitting information, but also as a research field and a research tool.¹ Nevertheless, not all these aspects of it are equally developed, and their actual use gives rise to various problems. Firstly, the task of shaping the information field for folkloristics remains as relevant as ever. Above all it must include information on scholarly communities or associations (of which there are none in Russia), organisations and foundations, initiatives, and sources of information (archives, journals, almanacs, non-periodical publications, monographs, dissertation abstracts and so on), followed by full-text versions of articles and monographs.

A large part of this list is already in existence and in more or less active use. Moreover, until recently it was only possible to obtain information quickly and completely from the 'Folklore and Folkloristics of Russia' website created and maintained by L. V. Rybakova.² Unfortunately the site has not been revised since 2006 and much of the information on it is out of date and no longer corresponds to reality.

The role of informing the scholarly community of developments in this area has to a certain degree been taken on by Mikhail Alekseevsky's blog on 'Present-day Folklore Studies as a Scholarly Discipline'.³ As for full-text versions of publications on traditional culture and folklore, except for the 'Folklore and Post-Folklore' and 'Fundamental Electronic Library'

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¹ See, for example, [Bogdanov; *Bibliografiya rabot; Folk-art-net* 2007; *Internet i folklor* 2009; Zakharkina, Adonyeva; Suslova 2009].

² <<http://ffr.nm.ru/>>.

³ Folklore and Post-Folklore: structure, typology, semiotics <<http://ruthenia.ru/folklore/index.htm>>; the State Republican Centre for Russian Folklore <<http://centrfolk.ru/>>; Russian Folklore in Contemporary Records <<http://www.folk.ru/>>; The Centre for the Study of the Traditional Culture of the European North. Lomonosov State University of the Pomorye <<http://folk.pomorsu.ru/>>; MGU Department of Popular Oral Culture <<http://www.philol.msu.ru/~folk/index.htm>>; The Russian Folklore Union <<http://www.folklore.ru/>>; Russian Traditional Culture <<http://ru.narod.ru/>>.

websites,¹ it is mostly the work of the author of any particular site² or of the staff of a particular research or teaching institution³ that is uploaded to the Web.

Some areas of this field, mostly the full-text versions of books and articles, may be found outside the scholarly sector of cyberspace. They may, firstly, be in various types of electronic libraries containing both pre-revolutionary and twentieth-century publications,⁴ or, secondly, on the websites of various social organisations, primarily those orientated towards national culture,⁵ or, thirdly, on the websites of individuals.⁶ It must unfortunately be noted that it is these sites, and not the FEB and academic sites, that provide the fullest selection of scholarly literature on folklore.

Is this in any way dangerous to the scholarly community? Does the presence of a serious academic text on an amateur site mean a blurring of the edges of academic knowledge? And what should we think of the fact that ‘for undergraduate and graduate students and many other experienced users the Internet is the main source of scholarly information, replacing libraries, archives and other repositories’?

Doubtless, only a few years ago, when broadband Internet hardly existed in Russia outside Moscow and Petersburg, and when Google was only just beginning its ambitious project of providing free access to the classical works of nineteenth-century Russian scholarship, the publications uploaded to the Net could not be regarded as authentic. But now, when they are served in pdf format and when even current scholarly publications, including on-line versions of journals, *Anthropological Forum* among them, also come out in that format, there is no longer any problem regarding the authenticity of academic texts published on the Internet.

One can imagine that the decision by VAK⁷ that all periodicals included on its list must have a web version with access — free or

¹ <<http://feb-web.ru/>>.

² <<http://mdalekseevsky.narod.ru/>>.

³ Besides those already mentioned, we should note the Electronic Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Slavonic Studies <http://www.inslav.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=29&Itemid=62>.

⁴ See, for example, Gbooks: books on history, archaeology, geography, ethnography, philology, linguistics, genealogy and philosophy, mostly published before 1917 <<http://gbooks.archeologia.ru/>>; Lilay Intueri: Rare books <http://intueri.narod.ru/raritet/raritet_01.htm>, <http://intueri.narod.ru/raritet/raritet_02.htm>, <http://intueri.narod.ru/raritet/raritet_03.htm>; <<http://www.twirpx.com/about/>>. One could also call the 'Literary Studies' and 'Historical Disciplines' sections of the famous tracker 'Rutracker' <<http://rutracker.org/>> a sort of library.

⁵ See, for example, Russian Fisticuffs <<http://www.buza.ru/>>; the Slavonic Library <<http://slav.olegern.net/index.php>> etc.

⁶ See, for example, Yakov Krotov's Library: Folklore <<http://krotov.info/spravki/temy/f/folklor.html>>.

⁷ See above.

restricted to subscribers — to full-text versions of their articles not later than a year after publication on paper would play a positive role in this process, as would the publication of extended abstracts of doctoral dissertations on the VAK website. Particularly noteworthy is the free remote access to the electronic catalogues of the Russian State Library and the Russian National Library, and also the possibility of obtaining scans of essential editions from these libraries, and also abstracts of dissertations and the dissertations themselves via intermediate companies.¹

Thanks to this process of making academic information available, so that one can work with it both off line and on line, the distinction between ‘metropolitan’ and ‘provincial’ scholarly communities is disappearing. Now any researcher in possession of the subject matter of the dissertations being submitted, academic events being planned, and the subjects and problems discussed in books and articles, can not only feel himself a fully-fledged part of the academic world, but also correlate his own projects with the ideas and general tendencies of academic thought. As for the overall problem of the reliability/authenticity of the academic text, it is connected not so much with the Internet as with the actual criteria of scholarliness and reliability accepted by one or another school of thought, and also with negative processes in the Russian higher education system.

Of course the Internet provides previously unheard-of possibilities for the distribution of parascientific and pseudoscientific texts, in the area of ethnology and folklore as much as in any other, but it is not the reason for their appearance, which is not specific to our day. People’s attitudes towards them and their role in the consciousness of society are indeed a serious problem of culture and *Weltanschauung*, but a different sort of problem.

Another consequence of the interaction between the Internet and folklore studies has been the formation of the folklore information field. The creation of websites that present traditional culture and folklore has become one of the main directions both of academic study and of cultural and educational activity today. Specialised scholarly websites, or areas on the websites of cultural and educational organisations have existed on the Russian-language Internet for a long time, and they present the folklore tradition in the accepted manner of the academic publication of folkloric texts. Dialect is preserved, a means of reference to the text is provided, the text includes part of the everyday speech context or conversation between the collector and the informant, and sometimes the stenographic

¹ Catalogue of dissertations and abstracts according to the VAK subject headings: <<http://www.dissercat.com/>>; Electronic Library of Dissertations <<http://www.dslib.ru/>>.

record is reproduced in full.¹ True, there is a strong predominance of sites representing local traditions.² Nevertheless it is no exaggeration to call this a drop in the ocean. The vast majority of archives of research and teaching institutions, to say nothing of private archives, are closed to the researcher. There is no question of digitisation or free Internet access even to that information that is not subject to copyright, nor will there be in the foreseeable future. For this reason many folklorists (and not only the young) are forced to work exclusively with materials from regional archives, their own field recordings and nineteenth- and twentieth-century publications.³ And whereas the people who work at the central research institutes and the universities of Moscow and Petersburg have the opportunity to do fieldwork in different parts of the country, the people who teach in provincial universities do not.

Just as the folkloristic information field is being formed both inside and outside academic cyberspace in the strict sense of the term, so is that of folklore. As far as the publication in pdf format of collections of folklore made in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is concerned, there is no difference from what has been said about the publication of academic texts. However, the specialised non-scholarly websites that offer contemporary recordings of classical folklore,⁴ or a particular aspect or particular genre of contemporary folklore,⁵ are more interesting and significant for folklorists, but not from the point of view of adding to the folkloric/ethnographic information base, since they do not fulfil the accepted criteria for authenticity and reliability. As a rule these records are unreferenced, and there is no information about where the informant got them from (in oral or written form, and if written, from a book or from the Internet), to what extent he has modified the text, etc.

Sites of this sort are interesting for another reason — from the point of view of the Internet seen as a particular field for conducting research into folklore and cultural anthropology. The Internet today is not only ‘high tech, special language’ but also ‘a means of solving

¹ In addition to the websites of teaching institutions cited above, see the Phonographic Archive of the Institute for Language, Literature and History of the Karelian Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences <<http://phonogr.krc.karelia.ru/>>; the Folklore Archive of Nizhny Novgorod University <<http://www.unn.ru/folklore/folk.htm>>; <<http://www.ocnt.isu.ru/zanry.htm>>; The Ulyanovsk Province Russian Folk Wedding <<http://russwedding.narod.ru>>; Traditional Folk Culture of Vologda Province. A Resource for Reference and Information <<http://www.cultinfo.ru/arts/folk/index.htm>>; The Traditional Culture of Irkutsk Province. Oral folklore <<http://www.ocnt.isu.ru/zanry.htm>>.

² On the principles for representing regional traditions see [Kaneva; Mishankina, Tubalova, Emer].

³ To some extent this limitation is in accord with one cardinal feature of classic peasant folklore — it is ‘regional and dialect’ (S. Yu. Neklyudov).

⁴ See, for example, Russian Folklore <<http://rusfolklor.ru/>>.

⁵ See, for example, Jokes from Russia, compiled by Dima Verner <<http://anekdot.ru/>>; Russian popular *chastushki* <<http://www.chastushki.ru/>>; The folklore of the criminal underworld <<http://www.blat.dp.ua>>.

various social and individual problems', and above all 'a significant factor and aspect of the milieu which modern man inhabits' [Rozin 2007: 17–18]. Philosophers and sociologists define today's society as the information society, centred on communication. 'Alongside the informational component of web communication, its capacity for social communication has perhaps a much greater significance. The Web is becoming human beings' social space, a new milieu with its own ontological characteristics, a particular "cyberspace" and "time on line"' [Kargin, Kostina].

This is a special integrated space in which 'it is possible in a single moment to use databases, libraries, public communication, private communication, on-line chat and suchlike forms of communication' [Kutyugin 2009]. This degree of integration has led to an essentially new form of communication, in which process and result are united — hypertext. 'Hypertext as a new textual paradigm may be considered a means of communication within society orientated on multiple simultaneous flows of information which cannot be perceived and processed by the subject. It becomes impossible to absorb the full sum of knowledge, and even the reducing such knowledge to a rigorous structure is a task hard to achieve. Knowledge is organised as hypertext, as a network of relatively free associations, which may come together and fall apart in the process of the production and consumption of knowledge' [Kuper].

This communicative space has its own forms and types of communication. These may be 'on-line or off-line dialogues (e-mail, ICQ) or polylogues (conferences, chat-rooms). Naturally, one can only speak of "a person within a virtual socium" in respect of the latter form of communication, above all conferences and chat-rooms' [Nesterova]. Blogs should also be included here [Safonova].

Internet communication offers everyone the unique opportunity not only to increase the number of his social contacts, but also to construct them according to his own tastes, selecting only those things that correspond to his personal socio-cultural requirements and priorities. The result of the expansion of social connexions and their organisation 'to taste' has been the appearance of new socia — web communities [Rozin; Aleksukhin]. Sociologists define this kind of social organisation as 'a group of people whose interaction takes place primarily over global computer networks'. Such an organisation must of necessity possess 'a social consciousness' arising from its connexion via 'a common ideology, tradition etc.' [Nesterov]. Web communities come into existence when 'the achievement of individual goals' most often 'interesting or useful contacts' becomes 'possible only through the creation of a group. [...] These groups do not have any particular external goal in relation to the group itself. The group's entire *raison d'être* is internal to itself, it exists in order to serve the interests of its

members and for no other purpose. As soon as its members “exhaust” each other, the group disintegrates. Naturally none of this applies to web communities that have a goal which is external to the group — distance learning groups, various commercial structures doing business over the Web, and so on’ [Nesterov].

Given such an approach to the Internet, even the aforementioned unspecialised websites, not to mention web communities, are a very important and interesting subject for study. P. Borodin has studied the community devoted to humour, primarily interested in jokes, in such a way. The method which he proposes allows us to study not the text of the jokes, but their contemporary carriers and performers (‘web personalities’) and certain of the written forms which embody the communicative process [Borodin 2007].

A web community which is very extensive on the Russian-language Internet is the community of brides, which exists on the forums of almost all nuptial portals.¹ These communities are made up principally of people who answer the requirements formulated in the name of the forums themselves. ‘The very name of the site assumes that the people who visit it will be engaged to be married, or expecting shortly to be so, or just married, or specialists in the field who can share their experience with those who are just beginning to find their way around the complex process of organising their own wedding.’² It appears from this definition that in fact the make-up of the community is considerably wider than its name would suggest. One should particularly note the presence of specialists in the wedding business — wedding planners, *tamada*,³ photographers, video photographers and representatives of firms providing these services.⁴

Brides’ forums carry a very wide range of topics and embrace almost every aspect of the process of getting married, which allows one to

¹ See, for example, Everything for your Wedding: Forum <<http://nasvadbe.kiev.ua/forum/>>; Forum.ru <<http://forum.forumok.ru/index.php?act=idx>>; the wedding forum on the ‘Krasivaya svadba’ website <<http://v-zags.com/forum/index.php>>; the Moscow and St Petersburg wedding forum <<http://forum.its-my-life.ru/>>; the Kolomna Wedding Forum: a portal for information and entertainment about weddings <<http://avtograf.gip-gip.ru/>>; the Svadebka.ws wedding forum <<http://forum.svadebka.ws/index.php>>; Wedding Panic <<http://www.ugolochek.ru/>>; Wedding 66 forum for brides <<http://www.svadba66.ru/forum/section1/>>; Barnaul Wedding: the Wedding Forum of Barnaul <<http://svadbabarnaul.ru/>>; the Yaroslavl Wedding Forum <<http://www.yarsvadba.ru/forum/>>.

² <<http://avtograf.gip-gip.ru/forum-f1/tema-t1.htm>>.

³ A Georgian word denoting the person who presides at a banquet [Trans.].

⁴ Some of the participants in these forums are also men (and not only those engaged to be married), but their number is infinitesimal in comparison with that of the young women, to whom these representatives of the wedding market — photographers, video operators, wedding planners etc. — primarily address themselves. There is an unusual male wedding forum on the ‘Konferentsiya iKhVT’ portal, where there is a heading ‘I’m getting married in a month! Tell me what might go wrong!’ in its ‘General’ section <<http://forum.ixbt.com/topic.cgi?id=15:55881-1-6>>. This topic shares the space with others such as ‘Where to find the best dentists in Moscow’, ‘How and where to choose good shoes’, ‘I stopped smoking for good at midnight: who will join me?’, ‘Cats (part 3)’, ‘Science in Russia: does it have a future?’ and so on <<http://forum.ixbt.com/?id=15>>.

collect a great deal of material, mostly about modern urban weddings, and discover the geographical distribution of a ritual and its particular components and the details of how they are conducted.¹ Thus the ritual of removing the bride's veil exists in Rostov-on-Don, Taganrog, Stavropol, Odessa, Kazakhstan (amongst Russian families), Ternopol, Chişinaŭ, Ussuriisk, Kiev,² Ekaterinburg,³ Kaliningrad, Murmansk,⁴ Minsk, Brest, Homel,⁵ Dolgoprudny (Moscow Province), Moscow⁶ and Donetsk.⁷ This example is also remarkable for showing how easily state frontiers are crossed by present-day wedding traditions,⁸ and the way they can become part of the wedding rituals of another people, and the attitude of the participants in the celebration to the incipient tradition.

The other thing that can be determined by an analysis of brides' forums is the value and meaning that their participants put on marriage and the wedding ceremony, and their personal and emotional attitude towards it, or Tradition and Personality in the Modern Wedding. Given that marriage traditions today are a complex and dynamic phenomenon, the relationship of the personality to them is ambiguous and contradictory.

In the first place, some participants in the forum unexpectedly discover that they have never heard of something that others regard as an undoubted and established tradition. There may be various reactions to this, from an impulse to join the tradition, that is, to include the said novelty in their own wedding, to a refusal to accept this innovation as a tradition, on the basis of their own experience or by an appeal to national tradition. The ritual of removing the bride's veil was alluded to above in connexion with its wide geographical distribution. This is how participants in various forums reacted to this new element in the wedding ritual.

Marineska: For various reasons I don't like the rite of removing the veil. In the first place I find a contradiction in it. It used to be thought in Russia that the groom should remove the veil on the wedding night, and a woman would keep her wedding veil for the whole of her life. They used to hang the veil on a baby's cradle to protect it from the evil eye. But according to this ritual the veil is

¹ On this see also [Rudenko 2009; Vlasova 2008].

² The World of Love and Romance <<http://world-of-love.ru/forum/showthread.php?t=8666&page=1-7>>.

³ Wedding66/Brides' Forum <<http://www.svadba66.ru/forum/section1/topic899/>>.

⁴ The wedding forum on 'Zapiski' <<http://tamadamurmansk.ucoz.ru/forum/19-6-1>>.

⁵ <<http://www.prazdnik.by/forum/viewtopic.php?f=12&t=1336>>.

⁶ Wedding Panic <<http://www.ugolochek.ru/index.php?s=72c72ef1eb9a418ce9b7c26aca5befb3&showtopic=8680&st=100&p=1751322&#entry1751322>>.

⁷ <<http://nevesta.dn.ua/forum/index.php?topic=330.15>>.

⁸ According to Internet data this tradition is most widespread in the Ukraine.

left with the bride's mother-in-law, and it's often her father-in-law who removes it. It seems to me that a bride should be a bride till the end of the ceremony. Secondly, you have to take great care of your choice of hairstyle, and warn the hairdresser in advance that you're going to do it. Otherwise you risk spoiling your hair, and your mood too. But that's just my opinion; whether to have such a ritual or not should in the end be decided by the bride and groom. (28.11.2007)

Minimama: I beg your pardon for intruding with my own unromantic opinion. But be so good as to say what the sense of carrying out this ritual is today, if the veil is removed when the bride hasn't been a virgin for ages? Where is the transition from maidenhood to married life? What are the kerchiefs like? Perhaps it is better not to change every ancient ritual into a farce? This ritual made sense in the olden days, when they didn't hire artistes to sing at weddings, but the songs were sung by the bridesmaids and the guests. (28.11.2007)

Aigul, who loves Aleksei: Nowadays many rituals have been distorted and re-worked according to the tastes of modern youth. Everyone does what they like. As for this 'ritual', if that's what the bride and groom want, why not?.. I can't see anything wrong with it or in bad taste. Marineska, you gave a very interesting and complete account of it, you're a clever girl! I'd never even heard of anyone doing that before now. In principle, it would be no bad thing to do, as something purely Russian (or Ukrainian), only, perhaps, not everyone will understand it, none of this is really close to me because I'm of a different nationality. (28.11.2007)

LiaMURka: Even though we don't live in the Ukraine, it's the groom who will remove my veil. I believe that it is a symbol of purity and innocence, so let him take it. That's logical. We're not going to have a kerchief at all. I really don't like that procedure. Although at weddings amongst us it's always the mother or mother-in-law who removes the veil, and the father-in-law who puts the kerchief on! (01.09.2009)

Girl next door: Anty, you forgot to say that the bride is only supposed to let her mother-in-law remove the veil at the third attempt:) The first time the mother-in-law takes an ordinary, ugly kerchief and tries to put it on the bride. The bride in turn throws it on the floor. The mother-in-law takes another kerchief, nicer than the first, and tries to put that one on her. The bride throws this one on the floor too, and finally, the third time, the mother-in-law takes the nicest and most expensive kerchief shows it to the bride, and ties it on her. And then the dancing begins:) Yes, I forgot: this was how it was done at my brother's wedding: three different kerchiefs. Ugly, average and nice. But

I only had one, but the first two times I wouldn't let them put it on my head. (15.10.2009)¹

Illusion: Girls, don't throw tomatoes at me, but for some reason this 'ritual' reminds me of the hanging-out of the sheet after the wedding night... Madness, take it off, hand it over, hang it out... Only don't be offended! (5 March 2009)

Enka: What is that ritual with the sheet? (5 March 2009)

Yulka (stressed on the first syllable): Well, on the morning after the wedding night they would take it out and show it to everybody. See... The bride was a virgin))) (5 March 2009)

Suslyusha: I heard that when the veil is removed, your mum puts the kerchief on to keep evil spirits off! (20 May 2009)

STENINA Natalia, organiser of beautiful weddings: Amusing, though all the details are from reliable sources. I read that the groom's mother keeps the veil, and spreads it over the child on the night after its birth to bring it luck. So I'm very pleased to discover the truth. (21 May 2009)

Yana: Fine, Larisa, in that case please tell me the meaning of this ritual. Why a kerchief in particular? (21 May 2009)

LARISA KRIVOSHLYK, organiser: Something like, a married woman should have her head covered (you can't very well put a hat on her), and married women even used to braid their hair differently. There was some story or film where this was all very well explained, but I can't remember which. (21 May 2009)

Yana: Understood, the organiser's approach is something different, but the meaning of the ritual — what is it? Why a kerchief and why do they tie it on her? OK, she's now a woman, but what sort of a symbol is a kerchief? Perhaps I want to remain a queen (and that is the image of the bride — a veil, a diadem, in other words a crown) all my life (even when I'm married). (21 May 2009)

Yana: And why not? Modernisation, progress, it is the twenty-first century, after all! You said yourself, it depends how you approach it. Seriously, Larisa, don't take this the wrong way, but it is your job to know all the rituals and traditions and how to make them look good. But I am a pernickety individual and used to analysing everything. And my views on this are absolutely clear, and NOTHING will change them. It seems to me that there is a time for everything... and some rituals and traditions from the past (the DISTANT past) look rather ridiculous in our

¹ The World of Love and Romance <<http://world-of-love.ru/forum/showthread.php?t=8666&page=1-7>>.

time and are gradually dying out, and being replaced by others... as your words prove. (21 May 2009)¹

This material does not exhaust all the possible directions for fieldwork on the internet today,² but it does show that such studies, including those of the modern Russian wedding, do have prospects and produce results. Almost all the existing forms of work may be applied to them: surveys, questionnaires, observation from within, documentary analysis. It is thereby possible to expand the circle of phenomena and facts, determine the ways by which traditions are preserved, transmitted and reproduced, and establish their geographical distribution. Working on forums and analysing the developing process of interaction between their participants also clarifies the meaning and value attached by young people today to particular elements of the wedding tradition and to marriage and the wedding ceremony as a whole, and their personal and emotional attitudes to them.

Short questionnaire

I am 59 years old, a member of the middle generation.

The Internet has significantly changed the content of my work.

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NATALIA MAZUR

Hobbs was right to warn against the use of metaphor in scholarly discourse. It is a false friend in explaining the object of study, and moreover apt to reveal much more of the psychology and cultural baggage of the author than either we or the author of *Leviathan* would desire. If I should say that in my view the appearance of the Internet is comparable to the invention of printing, but by no means to that of writing, the perceptive reader will see at once that the subject of my scholarly interests came into being and was set down on physical media before the Internet existed, and that it is most likely classical culture, not that of the masses, and that the problems of the ‘squirming tongueless street’¹ are for the most part unknown and uninteresting to me. And all that will be true.

Indeed, for a researcher like me, the Internet is mostly useful as a new way of preserving and transferring information, and it has only a minimal role as a field wherein I can find a new subject for research. Now is our blessed harvest time: gone are the days of the elemental outpouring of unsystematised information, and instead of enthusiastic individuals we have powerful learned institutions, and if there are not yet continents on the Web, there are at least fairly substantial islands of ordered knowledge, partly thanks to the systematic digitisation of sources dating from before the Internet, and partly to new projects.

Thanks to such websites as Google Books, Gallica, Joconde, JSTOR, Muse, Perseus, ARTFL etc., many searches and analytical operations which formerly would have taken up weeks if not months of painstaking work can be performed by the computer in seconds. The Internet has finally bridged the information gap between Russian and Western scholarship, provided equal access to many categories of source for scholars working in the capital or in

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¹ An allusion to Mayakovsky's poem *A Cloud in Trousers*. [Trans.]

the provinces, and has extended and simplified the possibilities for public discussion of research problems and results.

The majority of the problems raised in the questionnaire are for us either a thing of the past or have never arisen. Once the first information shock was over, it became clear that the borders of 'scholarliness' have remained unchanged: they are determined as before by the inner laws of that school of learning to which the author regards himself as belonging, and certainly not by where the material is published. It was equally possible in the past to find work which completely failed to match (my) criteria of 'scholarliness' in a respectable journal, and rare archival materials published in a volume of fantastical local studies.

The Internet has only made the consolidation of like-minded individuals quicker and easier: there have been several occasions to observe how professional postings or comments on LiveJournal have allowed a 'newcomer' to become 'one of our own' with extraordinary rapidity (by pre-Internet standards).

Our fears about teaching have also passed: students quickly understood how much easier it is to catch them downloading work from the Internet than copying from a text that has not yet been digitised.¹ It is easier to give an introductory lecture about useful websites than a course on bibliography and the use of sources; this latter has long disappeared from the teaching programmes of most humanities faculties — with the most lamentable consequences.

As for the reliability of materials published on the Internet, a right-thinking individual who has surfed the Net for a while is not much more likely to go astray than the one who cites 'blind' (taking a quotation or page number from someone else's work and not verifying them *de visu*).

By expanding the opportunities open to us, the Internet has greatly increased what is expected of us. We have lost a whole series of convenient excuses: it is ridiculous to blame the unavailability of literature and sources from abroad (and thus to use this to camouflage our inability or reluctance to read foreign languages), and one should be ashamed to make selective use of a bibliography, passing over all the provincial (or, conversely, metropolitan) editions (assuming, of course, that at least their contents lists are available on

¹ The Internet has in fact generated a different sort of problem for teaching. The volume of the information that we remember (our metaphorical 'hard disk') is inexorably shrinking, giving way to the 'working memory' concentrated at the tips of our fingers. However, in order to formulate a concept of any significant size (and also to deliver a course of lectures), one must have a large and regularly defragmented 'hard disk'. Of course, the process of the transformation of academic knowledge from 'knowing' to 'knowing where to look' began long before the appearance of the Internet (and mnemonic devices went out of active use long before that), but it is only in the last few years that the shrinkage of the 'hard disk' has proceeded so meteorically.

the Net). It has become much easier to avoid unwittingly repeating other people's observations, and to catch the aficionados of deliberate plagiarism.

There is a palpable shift in the hierarchy of methods and directions. There has been a sharp fall in the value of works whose authors confine themselves to identifying formal similarities without attempting to explain them (and this, incidentally, accounts for a great bulk of the works on intertextuality that have set the intellectual fashion for decades). It is becoming less popular to be a *Kulturträger*: thanks to the Internet, Western research is no longer inaccessible, and the original is more reliable than a second-hand account. Works compiled on the 'cut and paste' principle are regarded with increasing irony. It will probably never be possible to eliminate this venerable method, which dates from long before the Internet and has given us many a solid monograph, but the fact that it has become so ridiculously easy (one need no longer even open a book or type the letters) promises to reduce the number of people tempted to use it (though that is not a view held by our more pessimistic colleagues).

One would like to hope that these changes will increase not only the speed, but also the quality of work. It is clear that in our slow-moving affairs results will not appear instantaneously and one should not be in too much of a hurry to draw conclusions. However, even if the first, 'spontaneous' period of academic knowledge on the Internet is over, it seems that the academic community's reaction to it is still ongoing. The main problem is not the older generation, who take no notice of the Internet (especially when, by all accounts, its most worthy representatives have their own Google Books stored away in their heads, and their personal card indexes are richer than many a digitised archive). Most difficulties have arisen amongst scholars of the middle and younger generations, who have mastered the Internet, but have not been able to adapt their methodology (and sometimes their professional ethics) to it.

It is typical that the problem of plagiarism has become very acute over recent years: it seems that the ease of access to a diverse mass of sources has prompted a number of researchers to conclude that all ideas are common property and that one can either do without references to previous work altogether or learn how to gloss over one's own lack of originality. The extent to which Russian scholars are familiar with work from abroad (and *vice versa*) may well have increased, but that is certainly not reflected in the number of references to each other — far from it, a mechanism of 'exclusion' seems to have come into play, and the number of references has become, if anything, smaller. Since the extent to which texts published only on the Internet (particularly posts or comments on a blog) are protected by copyright is doubtful, the temptation to steal

someone else's discovery has become that much greater. This tendency has not been slow in bearing fruit: after the first brief flush of libertarianism, there has been a sharp drop in the number of people willing to participate in joint Internet projects in which the author's status is not clearly defined.

The waning fashion for primitive intertextuality has been replaced by a new fashion for visuality: 'searching by image', and the ease with which images can now be included in the text of an article has given rise to many works whose simplicity is no better than thieving.¹ Hardly any use is made of the Internet's potential as a discussion platform, most likely because of a reluctance to spend time and energy on 'other people's problems' (not that this is in any way specific to the Internet: there has been a similar decline in the practice of reviewing in print).

Still, all these problems can be ascribed to the difficulties experienced during a period of adaptation. Much more important is our reaction to challenges 'of a higher order'. Clearly it is only fair that someone who makes active use of resources created by other users should make his own contribution to the expansion and ordering of the scholarly materials available on the Web. The way our fellow-countrymen (working with extremely limited resources) have responded to that challenge is worthy of the sincerest admiration. A significant quantity of reference and bibliographical resources is being created and maintained not by large institutions, but by the enthusiasm of individuals or small groups.

However, it seems to me that the internet offers vast opportunities not only for the ordering of academic knowledge, but also for the modernisation of the academic text itself: there are many types of scholarly narrative that have the potential for hypertextuality and expression on a variety of levels, and could thus gain a great deal by being realised on the Internet. It is not even a matter of just making them more informative or easier to understand: the play of frames and hyperlinks and the use of multimedia can bring different meanings together in a way which is impossible on paper, however many footnotes and illustrations we use. (In this sense, the increasing number of successful educational integrated Internet resources is very telling.)

Of course, theoretical texts, and, in general, those texts whose concepts need to be developed in a linear manner will hardly be suitable subjects for web experiments: the less one is distracted when reading them, the better. But where there is extensive external material incorporated into the scholarly narrative, a skilful web

¹ 'It is better to be simple than to be a thief' — a Russian proverb. [Trans.]

presentation may produce a significant innovatory effect: descriptive scholarly prose, publications with commentary, research based on comparative procedures, etc., could all be expressed in totally new forms. Furthermore, these presentational forms provide an unseen stimulus to the researcher to expand and further systematise the material under study, and make manifest the hitherto invisible ‘subtle, powerful connexions’¹ and semantic potential in the mass of data (which is usually of a purely illustrative nature). Finally, when it is technically possible to juxtapose objects of various natures, the very limits of the material begin imperceptibly to widen. And these prospects will perhaps, despite their evident dangers, give a chance for traditional scholarship (and in particular literary scholarship) to re-take the positions which it has surrendered almost without resistance over the past two centuries.

*Malbroug s'en va-t-en guerre. Dieu sait quand reviendra.*²

Short questionnaire

Middle generation of scholars.

The appearance of the Internet has made little difference to the actual content and methodology of my work, but has had a very substantial effect on the speed of the collection and analysis of information.

VALENTINA METALNIKOVA

1

The criteria of scholarliness have not in themselves changed in any particular way. It is another matter that there are no more ‘reserves’ where only scholarly texts could be published. In fact, even PhD dissertations need no longer necessarily be ‘scholarly’, but this is not something that just happened yesterday.

It is not academic knowledge, but the requirements of the publishers that are becoming

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¹ A quotation from Bryusov’s sonnet *To Form*. [Trans.]

² This was a favourite quotation of my grandmother’s and later of my mother’s, and was used in the family to tease someone who was getting ready to go out, which means that I have been familiar with it all my life. Nevertheless, before finishing the article, I carefully consulted the Internet, to check that it was completely correct, whereupon I discovered that our family tradition evidently used Tolstoy’s arrangement of the quotation (as pronounced by the old prince in *War and Peace*), and that the original is slightly different: *Marlbrough s'en va-t-en guerre, ne sait quand reviendra*. Discovering a mass of useful and entertaining facts (in particular, from the very informative Wikipedia article on this song) was the work of no more than five minutes, and this is splendid; what worries me is something else — that I had to consult the Internet even to make a joke.

diluted. The community, as a rule, knows what a publication is worth. It is, unfortunately, beyond the community's power to stem the tide of unscholarly texts that are flooding scholarly publications.

2

Insofar as the criteria of scholarliness have not changed, this is the point of view from which it is preferable to examine and evaluate the texts that are published. And unfortunately in this sense the 'former hierarchies' have by no means lost their relevance: the extent of the knowledge base and the logic of exposition distinguish the undergraduate from the researcher, for example, just as they used to. It would be wonderful if the 'new forms', by abolishing the formal distinctions between the elements of the academic community, also supported and brought into evidence distinctions of substance. However, for the time being, use or non-use of the Internet does not in itself mean very much. Of course there are particular circles in which a researcher's reputation depends on his activity on the Web, but then, it was not unknown before for a researcher to be esteemed more for his or her 'packaging' rather than for any real contribution to scholarship.

3

The evaluation of sources has always been necessary.

4

The Internet is more convenient: everything is already mapped out, there is no need to worry about how to save and bring back your 'field recording'.

Short questionnaire

47, middle generation.

The extent to which the content of your work has changed under the influence of the internet: significantly.

IRINA NAZAROVA

1

The boundaries of academic knowledge have always been quite blurred. The appearance of the Internet has led to the results of research being more widely available, at which one cannot but rejoice.

2

The Internet offers additional opportunities for finding information and for communication with colleagues, but is unlikely to give rise to any qualitative changes in the organisation of the academic community.

3

I often use forums and blogs to obtain material for my dissertation (on omens and magical practices in contemporary society). It is difficult

4

for informants to remember all the omens and magical practices that they know when answering a collector's questions, but when these topics are discussed with other users, other people's memories often prompt their own. Besides, people are sometimes reluctant to discuss omens and magical practices with a stranger, for 'superstitious' reasons.

I can't reveal all the secrets, and no wife will tell you. Because if we tell you about all the traditions we use to make sure our husbands will come back safely, they won't work any more. There are secrets that mustn't be told. (Maria Pobedinskaya, wife of the pilot and cosmonaut Sergey Avdeyev) (*The White Sun of Baikonur*, documentary directed by D. Svergun, 2006).

It is evidently less dangerous to discuss 'superstitions' with friends and colleagues than with strangers; thus I have found valuable materials about the 'superstitions' of health workers on a site which is closed to users without medical training.¹ The Internet may be the natural habitat for texts and behavioural practices (smiley faces, 'Olbanian', and so on), or the place where they are described and discussed. In the second case, Internet sources may provide the researcher with only partial and not always reliable information about the context of their function. But many archival materials share the same fault.

The Internet allows the anthropologist to observe the discussion of various topics without its being distorted by the peculiar communicative features of the field interview and the presence of the researcher [Panchenko 2009: 119]. A scholar may not only follow discussions on blogs and forums, but also provoke them and ask questions, which means a certain interference in the cultural practices being studied. The participants in the Internet communities begin to be interested in the topics under research.

[Researcher:] Who is Karachun? — I've never heard of him. (Dreadful, isn't it? I'll have to get some info, it makes me want to know what it is myself:));² An interesting topic, where can one see the whole collection?³

The results of collecting on the Web are more open to other representatives of the communities studied than material from 'traditional' field interviews: one of my 'virtual' informants referred to a survey that I myself had conducted (under a different nickname)

¹ The Abbott products.ru page — medical information for doctors and patients (registration page) <<http://abbottgrowth.ru/doctors/examenation.aspx>>.

² 'Akagroundhog' (lj user). Replies to a survey published on the LiveJournal blog of user 'irina_24'. <<http://irina-24.livejournal.com/4002.html>> (retrieved 20.11.2006)

³ 'Maladoy' (lj user). Replies to a survey published in the LiveJournal community 'spb_auto'. <http://community.livejournal.com/spb_auto/349709.html?view=4163853#t4163853> (retrieved 03.11.2006).

on another site; materials from another of my surveys were used as material for an Internet article.

Can the results of Internet surveys be trusted? Anonymous communication admits the possibility of game-playing, deception and hoaxing.

[Researcher:] Who is the Black (or Blue) Hitchhiker? — Hmmm... it makes you want to make up a story...¹

But even in face-to-face communication we cannot be sure that our interlocutor is not trying to ‘help’ the researcher by making up facts in addition to what he actually knows ([Researcher:] ‘What other omens are there?’ — ‘If... something or other... [turns to her fellow-students] We have to think of something...’ [AFW: SPbGATI students]), surprise him or lead him astray (on informants’ improvisations during field interviews, see [Moroz]).

The anonymity of blog and forum users is relative: they want to communicate successfully in the web community and maintain their image and reputation. I think that on the whole V. L. Volokhonsky was right to observe that ‘people practically do not use the opportunities for anonymity offered by the Internet. Bloggers very rarely construct new personalities, boys do not pretend to be girls, little girls do not pretend to be grandmothers, and grandmothers do not pretend to be extraterrestrials. They simply have no reason for doing so. Besides, it is much harder than describing one’s own reality and one’s own experiences’ [Volokhonsky 2007: 6].

Short questionnaire

Age or academic generation that you consider yourself as belonging to: the younger generation.

The extent to which the content of your work has changed under the influence of the Internet: insignificantly.

Abbreviations

AFW — Author’s fieldwork

SPbGATI — Sankt-Peterburgskaya gosudarstvennaya akademiya teatrnogo iskusstva [St Petersburg State Academy of Theatrical Arts]

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¹ ‘Ogonoku_kun’ (lj user). Replies to a survey published on the LiveJournal blog of user ‘irina_24’. <<http://irina-24.livejournal.com/4002.html>> (e-mail from the author’s personal archive).

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ELENA NOSENKO-SHTEIN

Before responding to the editors' questions, I should like to express a few ideas concerning the 'internetisation' of academic knowledge in Russia. I have principally in mind the humanities and social sciences, and, accordingly, scholars working in those fields. I feel that one should not exaggerate the scale of 'internetisation' in Russia at present. By no means everyone — and not only among the older generation, but among the middle and younger generations too, even in the humanities institutes of Moscow — knows how to use a computer. In a number of cases this is the result of mental inertia, but it is also the result — to a very large extent — of the miserable salaries paid to the majority of scholars working in the humanities.

The same can be said of the Internet: many scholars cannot afford it. Many humanities institutes, even in the capital, do not have enough computers and are not very 'internetised' so that the people who work there cannot even use the Internet at work. The situation is even worse in the provinces, where as a rule the salaries of scholars working in research institutes and universities are even lower, as is the provision of technical equipment and degree of connexion to the Web. Of course the younger generation has a much better command of computers and the Internet, but one must not forget that this generation is quite poorly represented in humanities universities and research institutes. The majority of humanities scholars belong to the older or 'middle to older' generation. Once young specialists have got their PhDs, they

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frequently leave the field of Russian scholarship either for work abroad or for more lucrative pastures. I am forced to rehearse these well-known facts in order to make it clear that we are talking about a minority of the scholarly audience in Russia, those who really are actively involved in Internet technology. Therefore in answering the questions below I shall always be bearing these circumstances in mind.

1

I suppose that the dilution of academic knowledge will continue in future. This is fraught with both positive and negative consequence for knowledge itself. Among the positive consequences we must probably count the fact that academic work that is of good quality and not too complicated for the 'uninitiated' is becoming accessible not only to the academic community but to everyone who is interested in the problems of the humanities and social sciences. No such wide popularisation of humanities and social science research would have been possible before the Internet became widely available. This means that academic knowledge is not longer the exclusive preserve of 'initiated highbrows'. Among the negative consequences we must count the wide dissemination of parascientific, semi-scientific, and downright anti-scientific writings, which not only has a negative effect on an audience which is not prepared for them, but is harmful to scholarly research and to the image of scholarship, including especially the social sciences as a whole.

Among the side-effects of internetisation we must also count the fact that it is becoming difficult or impossible even for a professional to keep up with even the basic publications in his or her discipline. One way out of this, it seems to me, would be the further development of electronic scholarly journals, on-line and off-line conferences and suchlike events, and the improvement of the databases, mailing lists, websites, etc. available to professional scholars. Nor should one forget that the Internet is not yet in a position entirely to replace paper publication, because new books and learned journals are not usually uploaded to the Web. This means that paper publications, even in their electronic versions, will occupy an important niche in the development of academic knowledge for a long time yet.

2

My attitude is generally highly positive. Not only that, I feel that these forms of scholarly communication must be extended. In Russia, I suppose, electronic distribution of new materials in the various branches of the humanities and social sciences, and the organisation of all kinds of forums and discussions, are very important. It is quite possible that the evolution of such forms of communication will not only efface distinctions within the academic hierarchy, but lead to a proliferation of unprofessional and dilettante forums and websites (or rather, it already has), but I still feel that the positive consequences must outweigh the negative. Furthermore, the

evolution of such means of scholarly communication may lead to the gradual involvement in them of researchers who make little or no use of them at present. This is all the more important given the very severe limitations on travel to other cities (let alone abroad) within our universities and research institutes. Of course the new forms of communication cannot replace ordinary conferences and symposia or the live contact and exchange of ideas which are frequently more important than the event itself. But they do definitely increase the opportunities for scholars to involve themselves in such forms of communication, and to create new communities — forums, websites, discussions etc.

3

I have various means of verifying the data that I obtain from the Internet. But the foremost of these is the use of scholarly publications *on paper*: books, journals, and various works of reference, when I have confidence in their authorship and/or authority. I have no such confidence when I use the Internet, because there is a large quantity of unverified and inauthentic information in circulation on it. I also attempt to verify information on the Internet itself using well-known websites, portals and so on, but taking into account that much material is simply copied from site to site with the same mistakes, I try to be as cautious as possible.

4

As an anthropologist studying questions of the formation of cultural self-identification, historical memory, mixed marriages etc., I do use Internet resources among others. In my case they have the very specific feature of not, for the time being, being the basic source. The basic sources remain observation from within and the in-depth interview. Material from various sites basically serves to illustrate different aspects of my work. Moreover, as a rule these materials reflect the experience of only part of my research field: young and middle-aged people living in large cities. More or less the same may be said of the e-mail interview: by and large it is only possible with young people and some middle-aged people, all of whom live in large cities.

Thus research conducted by anthropologists on the Internet reflects a fairly specific milieu. It does need to be further studied, and perhaps this study will require improvement to the old methods.

On the whole it must be said that the ‘internetisaion’ of academic knowledge in Russia is a present the preserve of a minority of humanities scholars (taking into account the average age of such specialists, particularly in the academic milieu). And for the time being they are studying only part of the ‘field’ (and this is particularly true of sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists). But — and this is encouraging — ‘the process is under way’, and it must be developed and improved.

Short questionnaire

I regard myself as belonging to the middle generation of researchers.

The content of my scholarly has changed significantly as a result of the introduction of web technology.

DARYA RADCHENKO**1****2**

It seems somewhat premature to speak of a dilution of academic knowledge or change in its criteria. At the same time, the role of the accustomed ‘seals of quality’ on a text — the author’s position in the academic hierarchy, the reputation of the institute where he works, or the publication in which the text appears — is indeed changing. One reason for the appearance of serious academic works outside the established institutions is the opportunity afforded by the Internet of access to the academic resources of the world, from web libraries to distance communication with colleagues. Academic knowledge and the methods of obtaining it are no longer ‘esoteric’ and to one degree or another are becoming available to anyone who is interested.

The other side of the question is perhaps connected with the processes that have been taking place in the humanities in our country over the last few decades. These are a lowering of the requirements for dissertation, publications in leading journals, etc. The result is a situation in which the presence or absence of a given ‘seal of quality’ by no means always guarantees that a text meets the criteria of scholarship. This is undoubtedly an inconvenient situation: when the information field is enormous and constantly increasing, landmarks for finding the necessary high-quality information are essential. This problem is probably to be solved by improving the reputation of scholarly platforms, including those on the Internet.

The significance of this last has not yet been fully realised and is underestimated. Thus an Internet conference often turns into the electronic publication of a text without its having

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been discussed at all seriously, and this is one reason why many scholars decline to take part in them (others reasons are wariness concerning intellectual property rights on the Internet, lack of experience in interaction in cyberspace, etc.).

However, web communication does open up wide opportunities for discussing the most topical questions. It is most unlikely that web platforms will replace 'live' conferences and seminars in the foreseeable future, but they are already supplementing them to an important extent by overcoming geographical and language barriers between participants.

3

In principle this problem is not a new one. There were inaccurate and unscrupulous interpretations of the material being studied (which on the one hand are a matter for the author's conscience, and on the other can quite easily be discovered if sufficient thought is given to the analysis of the text), as well as complete falsifications, even before the Internet was invented and developed. The risk of coming across this sort of thing inevitably means that parallel sources must be consulted and that the data obtained by different researchers must be compared. By analogy, for example, when field materials are being collected there is always the possibility that the information will be distorted by the informant, and a large set of research tools was long ago developed to eliminate the effects of such a situation, and these work perfectly well in the Internet field too. Not only that: besides being the source of a mass of unreliable and distorted texts, the Internet also offers enormous possibilities for verifying information.

4

Any answer this question must undoubtedly go beyond the presumed limits for this discussion, but we shall try to respond in brief. The Internet is an active field for the formation of meaning. A significant number of folkloric texts are not transferred to it from the sphere of oral communication, but are gradually created in the process of communication over the Net. Moreover, an aptitude for the creative interpretation of reality, for 'creativity' is a fundamental value for a whole series of large web communities, which stimulates the creation not only of individual texts, but also of new channels and forms of communication, etc.

Web folklore is undoubtedly not an isolated phenomenon and it includes text that are typical of traditional folklore or urban folklore, but it has various peculiarities which are to a large extent connected with the technical possibilities and limitations of the sphere in which it exists.

Thus in the process of communication on those parts of the Internet which presume interpersonal communication in real time or something very close to it (chat rooms, forums, blogs), a text functions as

oral and written simultaneously. This has come to be known as 'written oral communication': the text is entered on the Web in written form, but preserves the characteristics of spontaneous speech. This determines both a number of the characteristics of web folklore as such, and the integration of both oral and written forms of urban folklore and their functioning in the Internet milieu. Whereas when recorded in any of the forms typical of urban folklore (albums, songbooks, jokebooks etc.) a text is perceived as archival and not subject to variation, on the Web, by contrast, the 'written' text is a living form of folklore.

The translation strategy known in English as 'copy and paste' is also typical of the Internet. The basic operations of the Windows platform are fundamental to the transmission of text over the web. In many cases the text is not re-told, but copied whole. Thanks to the 'copy and paste' mechanism, a large number of folkloric forms which are practically incapable of oral transmission because of their large size and the amount of specialised (professional, subcultural, etc.) jargon in them, can arise and circulate on the Internet; similarly, visual forms of web folklore (including texts with a mixture of verbal and non-verbal elements, photos, collages, videos, animations etc.) are becoming highly significant.

The possibility of automatic forwarding also makes the transmission of folkloric texts quicker and easier. Not least because of the size of the web community and the technical possibility of the high-speed transmission of information, web folklore often becomes the medium for the reception and adaptation of current events, which, on the one hand, excites a wide interest in its texts, and on the other, limits the period of time for which they are culturally active.

As a result of the high speed at which information is transmitted over the Web, and also of the combination in a single informational field (and sometimes even in a single text) of synchronic and asynchronic communication, texts become unstable and liable to be changed or even to disappear. Accordingly the whole complex of internet folklore is also quite fluid and changeable both from the point of view of collecting the texts, and from that of the processes that they undergo.

Finally, the concept of what is 'local' no longer concerns geography but cyberspace. New multi-centred and even multi-lingual communities and connexions are coming into being.

Because of the peculiarities of the milieu and the texts that inhabit it, web folklore is a unique type of material, and opens up possibilities for the study of a series of questions which have hardly been investigated within traditional folkloristics. Once a text is on the Net, it can in theory remain there for an unlimited period of time. Thanks

to this one can with a fair degree of confidence determine its authorship and trace the history of its development, including the establishment of the greatest possible number of variants. Search engines include a number of quite highly developed tools allowing one to obtain quite reliable data about the number of times a text has been reproduced (the audience demand for it) over a particular period of time. A properly constructed enquiry allows one to find not only the greatest possible number of instances of the text's reproduction, but also its variants, and also to evaluate the dynamics of its existence both on the Internet as a whole, and in specific sectors of it. The possibility of determining the socio-cultural profile of the author of the text or its re-posters is also important.

The Internet also offers a wide field for the study of the context in which folklore exists. Unlike the traditional collection of folklore (when its performance is often initiated by the collector's request, or when it is studied in its natural milieu but often changed by the presence of the collector), when Internet folklore is studied the collector remains 'invisible' and can make a full record not only of the text, but of the situation in which it was reproduced in real time or *post factum*.

Meanwhile, the Internet is opening up wide possibilities for observation from within. The researcher enters the communicative situation as a participant, identifying himself as a collector or remaining anonymous depending on the direction of his investigations. This approach allows him to provoke the reproduction of texts, and narrow down the questions around them (their origin, the way they are performed, the attitude of the audience, etc.), and to understand what is happening 'from inside', and construct experiments connected with the evolution of folkloric texts.

Short questionnaire

Age: 31.

The extent to which the content of your work has changed under the influence of the Internet: radically.

ILYA UTEKHIN

1 At first sight it would be more correct to compare the spread of the Internet less with the integration of writing into daily life than with the spread of printing. However, alongside the revolution in the accessibility of texts and the possibilities of hypertext (which became evident to the generality of Internet users in the 1990s) the

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Internet is a multi-media universe that expands the frontiers of our everyday reality. The transference into this universe of existing social networks and the formation of a new kind of community, the expansion of human personality and the very concept of presence all place the Internet in the same category is writing rather than printing. The anthropological interpretation of this technology and its various forms is now on the agenda.

I do not see that there is any ‘dilution’ of academic knowledge as a result of the Internet. If there are serious texts on scholars’ personal pages, they have already been published or accepted for publication. Neither scholarship as a cultural system nor scholarly activity as such have received any essentially new forms, though they have received new tools and means of expression. It is hard to evaluate whether any qualitative or quantitative addition to the knowledge of the world has been the outcome of this activity, and harder to correlate any such change with the Internet. It is nevertheless obvious that even when there is an ever-increasing ‘boundless informational field’, it is the capacity of the individual’s mind (and in particular, the scholar’s mind) that sets the parameters and limitations of workshop standards and practices: who is acknowledged as a scholar, and what preparation is necessary in order to become one.

This is as true of children in the first year of primary school as it is of academics. Teachers are completely frank about this when talking to parents bewildered by the new school curricula, paraphrasing the seminars they have attended at the local education department by saying more or less that there is taking place a transition from the ‘paradigm of knowledge’ (which evidently belongs to the past) to the ‘activity approach’. This means that in the near future people will not be required to carry everything in their heads: it is more relevant to know how to find (and understand) the necessary information and data.

We should note that when writing appeared, and when printing appeared — and now, when the Internet has appeared — there are inevitably critical evaluations of the role of these technologies, of the sort that students are studying on Wikipedia, they remain in reality deeply ignorant and have little acquaintance with the classics and possess exclusively second-hand knowledge. Plato re-tells through the mouth of Socrates the tradition about Thoth, where the king says much the same about people who rely on writing.¹

The existing academic norms for citation and ‘collaborative filtration’ by the efforts of the professional community are sufficient to maintain an acceptable level of content and authenticity. As for stupidities,

¹ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274d.

traditional paper technology is not proof against them (even in learned journals). There arises a more interesting question: what, in a situation where it is not necessary to carry everything in one's head, is the criterion for having a sufficient education to be a 'scholar'? How much of the classics (and in what disciplines) must someone have absorbed in order to be capable of generating new anthropological knowledge? And does one have to be a member of the professional guild for this?

This question is the more acute when new knowledge is frequently generated nowadays in relative disregard of the boundaries between disciplines, in collaboration with colleagues who represent different, sometimes unrelated disciplines (or, to put it more broadly, fields of activity). It is hard to say how far the academic community is prepared to accept that this sort of collaboration, multiplied by the possibilities of the new media, is likely to be fruitful.

4

The behaviour of one group of people or another in their capacity as Internet users may in itself be the subject of anthropological study. It is however more frequent for Internet materials to be used as sources by a researcher who regards them as a sort of virtual cast of the off-line sphere of social reality that he is studying, or as an independently existing sphere that owes its existence solely to the Internet.

People leave traces on the Internet, which are generally accessible to those about them in the form of texts, but also as images and multimedia objects. All this may be of interest to the researcher, but first and foremost the Internet is a vast indexed corpus of texts, which can be used as a basis for drawing conclusions about something regarding the language, speech (text) and, consequently, interests of the community of carriers and the stereotypes of their mentality.

At this point, admittedly, we immediately encounter the important question of whom these stereotypes belong to. If linguists can draw conclusions based on data from the Russian National Corpus, is it permissible for anthropologists and sociologists to draw conclusions based on Runet as a whole as a sort of macro-corpus? Certain conclusions evidently can be drawn, but with a multitude of provisos. Thus we can use a search engine (e.g. Yandex) to see how many pages a particular word is to be found on. My colleague Sergei Lavrov communicates his results, measuring the occurrence of the adjective *preslovutyi* 'notorious' on Runet as a collocation with proper names. Are these data a fact of language, or of discourse? What are they representative of? Whose discourse is this?

Data about word frequency and collocation in texts are extremely curious, particularly when we can limit the range of sources counted. But in general user-generated content on forums and blogs is

interesting to the research because the users are generating text for each other, reflecting not only their language, but their opinions and concerns. There it is, the naïve researcher's dream field, unspoilt by any influence of the observer!

The problem is, however, that so long as we are only eavesdropping without participating, we cannot always interpret the material or assess how representative it is. It is rather like assessing public opinion by listening to radio phone-in programmes (and who does phone in, for heaven's sake?). Only involvement and observation of real behaviour will allow us to draw conclusions that are in any way valid.

Generally speaking, data about the behaviour of users do not necessarily presuppose involvement. Let us say, there is information (in the form of a database of searches) about what users search for, how, and how often: this seems extremely interesting. The interests of the Internet audience and their dynamics, sorted according to geography, time, and combinations of searches, are invaluable material not only for the sociologist, but also for a whole range of commercial enterprises. For this reason they are a commercial secret and unavailable to sociologist, or to the general public, except as little tit-bits in periodical press releases from the Yandex press office. The interested advertiser or advertising agency can find little bits of statistics via the Yandex tool YandexDirect, which is intended for those who intend to buy advertising.

There was a time when it was possible (on <liveinternet.ru>), without payment to see the statistics of pages visited as a result of web searches. Even a cursory look at these statistics — say, how the twenty most frequent search terms changed from year to year or month to month — makes one wonder how far they reflect the behaviour of users (and why they reflect it in that way) in comparison, for example, with data from surveys of Internet users periodically carried out by sociological services. This situation is more than the divergence between what people do and what they say they do, because the aggregated data conceal the extremely diverse profiles of the on-line behaviour.

On-line communities are the phenomenon which is most interesting and specific to the Internet. Communication mediated by the computer has matured to such an extent that it has substantially expanded everyday reality by means of a new type of institution, which is different from the social institutions to which we are accustomed.

How should one study the ethnography of such a community? Ethnography presupposes that the ethnographer should immerse himself in the life of the group that he is studying, and on the internet he is dealing with only one aspect, albeit an important one, of these

people's lives. And doing it by e-mail, telephone or chat is not proper ethnography, because reading texts is not direct interaction. This does not exclude the need to solve the whole set of traditional problems by accessing the field and receiving one's own role in the community. It is another matter that self-presentation on the Internet has its own peculiarities.

The result is a sort of 'low bandwidth' ethnography. Nor could it be otherwise, especially when some of these groups and phenomena exist only (or primarily) in the Internet. They are not all that the anthropologist is interested in, and in a significant number of cases (when the new media are vehicles for something which cannot be reduced to them), the formation of a community is by no means unambiguously reflected in the formation of a social network on the Internet. At the same time the ordinary ethnographer, who is studying an off-line community, cannot ignore the possibility that this community has an virtual dimension.

As on any 'voyage into the unknown', there are no ready-made techniques for research use of the new media (apart from the utterly trivial). It seems, however, that the creation of special web resources ultimately intended for the collection of ethnographic data and, more broadly, different ways of including users in the research as co-participants, are subjects for future experimentation and theorising. So are the fundamentally new technical possibilities in the field of artificial intelligence. Let us suppose that there are no technical reasons why machine learning should not teach a programme to trace patterns of activity on the Internet that would allow the identification of extremist communities. Here the ethnographer is needed in the initial stages to solve a problem of applied science, and after that the algorithm is nothing but mathematics. However, methods of data mining might be used to obtain the initial material and in actual anthropological research.

Short questionnaire

To which academic generation do you consider yourself as belonging: the middle generation.

If the content of my work has changed, then it is not so much under the influence of the Internet, as of the content of the texts made accessible by the Internet (i.e. journal articles and full-text databases).

ANNA ZHELNINA

The scholarly community's basic problem with the expansion of the Internet is that people do not know how to use it. Authors commit such absurdities as citing an abstract 'Internet' (without a specific URL) in their bibliographies, or completely ignore material on the Web as unworthy of serious attention. This may be considered a temporary disorder; after all, even the Russian national standards for bibliographical references already contain more or less adequate ways of describing electronic and web resources as sources. The scholarly and pedagogical communities' bewilderment in the face of the chaos and overload of virtual communications may be considered a similar childhood ailment. The disease itself is mild and of short duration, though it does carry the risk of certain complications. These complications, in my view, are chiefly connected with the use of data from the Web as empirical material for sociological and anthropological research, though an understanding of the specifics of the Internet is important both for one's education and for the success of one's academic career.

The academic community and the web

It is hard to deny nowadays that the Internet has seriously modified the functioning of academic communities. It has become substantially easier to search for grants, publication possibilities and academic contacts, and this is especially relevant for scholars living in the provinces. Even though they are not in constant personal contact with the key individuals in their discipline, they still have some chance of access to these most important resources in the community. Besides, there is now another resource for career development and acquiring a reputation that was not there before: Western scholars have already got used to the idea that maintaining one's own blog or site, moderating a professional mailing list and active participation in on-line discussions are also serious means of advancing one's position in the community, just like the

publication of the results of research in good journals and taking part in conferences. Web communication has thus established itself as an instrument for creating a reputation, and this is particularly important for young scholars and those at the start of their career, who are trying to make a name for themselves by all possible means.

Internet communication may also help to support national professional communities: it bridges the gap between different organisations that are not closely connected in the real world. I once had the opportunity of observing a touching situation: members of a certain academic institution reading aloud a post on a blog by a colleague from a different organisation describing a major staffing reorganisation in a third establishment. Information about many other events in the professional milieu is disseminated in the same way, thus maintaining it in a more or less integrated condition.

This, however, to judge by the questions asked, is considered the least problematical aspect of the matter. Much more baffling is the difficulty in determining the level of scholarship of texts published on the Web. The ease of re-publication and distribution of texts on the Internet means that perfectly serious texts may appear on a site beside the lucubrations of dilettantes or something even worse, at the whim of the compiler of the on-line library. For example, well-written work by anthropologists about omens may be placed on the web pages of folk-healers. However, I do not consider this a problem: the scholarly level of a paper is hardly to be determined on the basis of where it is published.

The indicators of the 'academic respectability' and reliability of a text published on line are found as before in its content, the authority of the author, his affiliation, and the prestige of the publisher of the text. The system of reputations that exists in academic social networks in the real world is still present in virtual communication space. All that has changed is its technical aspect, which is hardly of overriding significance. It is necessary to find the original source of a text, in order to make sure that that is what is cited in the bibliography (even if your colleague's work was first discovered on the site of a folk-healer, psychotherapist or the personal blog of some interested layman). Moreover, in view of the reputations that exist within the community, the authority of the site of a learned society (or even of the personal blog of a respected scholar) will always be greater than that of an anonymous post on a forum.

I do not see a great difference between the blurring of the edges between 'scholarly' and 'non-scholarly' texts on paper or in electronic form: that is a much wider question and relates to a completely different problem — the tendency of academic knowledge to become much less turned in upon itself. Academics were already trying to reach a wide public before the Internet had even been heard of, and

parascientific articles, and scientific articles written in popular language, used to appear — as they still do — on the pages of glossy magazines. At present it happens that some academic and perfectly respectable publications in Russia sometimes publish texts of such a quality that no decent professional site would accept them. On the contrary, self-respecting Internet resources are much more fastidious in their choice of texts for publication, not least because they are much more widely read than the said academic journals, many of which serve exclusively as a platform for publication, but not for reading and discussion.

In my opinion, a dilution of the criteria for determining what constitutes a scholarly text is not the most important consequence of the expansion of the Internet; it is a process which was underway in any case. By contrast, the appearance of new mechanisms for the evolution of communities, the dissemination of knowledge and, above all, the growth of interdisciplinarity in research are seriously changing the face of the humanities and social sciences. The penetrability of borders between disciplines and subject-oriented research seem to me direct and substantive consequences of the evolution of web communication. The blurring of borders between disciplines is also favoured by such a simple technical detail as the mechanism for searching on the Internet: one may of course suppose that sociologists are looking for specialised sociological resources, but they will search according to the subject of their research (for example, for information about ‘monocities’). In this way they will discover works by anthropologists, economists and political scientists working on the same subject. As a result, we can expect to see in the near future a phenomenon of mass interdisciplinarity, and a growth in subject-oriented clusters such as urban studies, European studies and other ‘studies’, which will replace the accustomed anthropology of the city, sociology of the city, politics... etc.

Education and the web

Thus from the point of view of the development of the academic community, Internet communication is an undoubted benefit. Many more questions are raised by the role of the Internet as the prime source of information for humanities undergraduates. On the one hand, the availability of information on the Web does allow students to find out a great deal more during the course of their studies than was possible for their predecessors thirty years ago. On the other hand, the interdisciplinary ‘soup’ of the Web can be very dangerous to those who do not know how to deal with it. Lecturers are constantly encountering attempts by students to pass off as sociological essays assemblages of facts copied from a popular site, or their credulous use of data taken from a fashionable journal for travellers, and so on.

Being unfamiliar with the criteria for identifying a scholarly text amongst the pile of information on the Web, students run the risk of getting lost in it and never finding out the difference.

In this situation new possibilities are being uncovered that demand a serious reorientation of university courses. The focus of education, when information is so widely available, must shift from how to find it to how to analyse it, and also to the formation of criteria for its selection. Whereas formerly a student's work stood out if it contained material that was hard to find or not obvious, there is no longer anything remarkable about that. They really need to work with their material, present and process it in an original way, which is what many of them never learn to do. Nowadays the lecture is losing its *raison d'être*: not much of it is retained by the memory, while the most important skills for students are those which allow them independently to identify useful and reliable information from the boundless sea of the Internet and other sources.

The lecturer's task is to point the students in the right direction, offer them criteria for the selection of information and discuss with them the limitations of Internet resources. This requires new skills on the part of the lecturers themselves, who must change the traditional conduct of their courses and direct the students not merely towards simply knowing the facts, but towards a reflective attitude towards information and its special features. In principle these are quite general requirements which would be necessary for teachers of the humanities and social sciences even without reference to the Internet. This is what is needed at a time when information is accessible, multifarious and not always likely to be right.

Meanwhile, Internet technology is not standing still and is already well on the way to simplifying a person's choice, or rather depriving a person of choice altogether. There are specialised systems for bringing together scholarly publications (JSTOR, Science Direct and many others), and Google Scholar, which allows one to search only 'scholarly' resources... It is obvious that the mechanisms for drawing a line between the scholarly and the unscholarly have not gone away, they have just acquired a new face and technical operation. In this way our colleagues' universally acknowledged texts (that is, acknowledged by the search engines and library systems) can easily be filtered out from 'everything else', though there is no guarantee that the filter is good enough to let through interesting unacknowledged sources.

A more serious question concerns empirical data rather than analytical articles: how to use the limitless possibilities of the Internet for collecting empirical material without detriment to the quality of the research.

The specifics of web materials in research

In my opinion, the problem of the reliability of Internet sources is neither critical nor new. A professional researcher must try to verify information obtained from the Internet just like any other material, and compare data from various sources, as one would, for example, with data obtained from interviews. The unconsidered use of data from the Web is a much more substantial problem. There is indeed such a quantity of first-hand information on the Internet, it is so detailed and seems to represent every possible interested party to every question, so that it would be simply foolish not to use it. Besides, the stormy and interesting dynamics of Internet life are themselves an extremely attractive research topic. (Incidentally, a search on the specialised academic search engine Google Scholar for the words 'Internet' and 'social networks' produced, in Russian alone, over 19,000 hits, which testifies to the huge popularity of this subject amongst scholars in this country.)

However, there is a great risk that the results of research conducted on materials from social networks will be presented as universally applicable. Unfortunately, researchers into the humanities and social sciences risk falling into the Internet trap. Having become accustomed, while they were students and under pressure from endless deadlines and a heavy workload, to obtain information quickly and easily from the Web, without difficult field trips to talk to real live human beings, and without the negative situations that may arise from them, and the drain on their time and emotions, they find it hard to imagine themselves as field workers 'here and now'. And indeed, why should they go and ask someone in person about things that he has already set out in detail on a social network or blog, supplied with illustrations, received the comments of his 'friends' and responded to them?

This attitude is occasionally reinforced by older colleagues, who extract interesting data from the Internet and sometimes forget, or see no need, publicly to interpret its limitations and peculiarities in their publications. The result is a situation where scholars are gradually beginning to offer research into the Internet as if it were a study of real live society, silently equating the one with the other.

Such an unconsidered approach not only threatens the validity of the data, but also severely limits the possibilities for scholarly analysis. Everyone knows that what happens on the Net does not always correspond one hundred per cent to the actions and convictions of actual Internet users, though one should equally refrain from making a schizophrenic distinction between the real and the virtual. There remains nevertheless a substantial problem of a lack of knowledge of the context of what is said on the Internet: the researcher often deals with his material in a vacuum, where we can know nothing about

why the material came into being, who wrote it and what motivated him. The field for interpretation is vast, but not very solid: it is not often that one can ask an Internet source what it meant, or to clarify what it says. Naturally, one can put the question in such a way that these limitations are insignificant, but it is important for the researcher to understand what the limitations are and to act accordingly, using supplementary sources for comparison or explaining why this is not necessary.

At the same time, activities on social networks and in the ‘real world’ have long ceased to be unidirectional, each has quite a strong influence on the other. For example, social initiatives that begin as waves of indignation on social networks may with time turn into groups of people taking the initiative in the real world, and new communication technology has radically changed certain details of business and professional life. The study of these interrelations, which could explain a lot about the structure of modern society, the origin of new social movements and forces, instruments of ideological and market manipulation, should not escape the grasp of social scientists, but this will certainly happen if they use their material in an unconsidered manner.

The division between the Internet as source and the Internet as object is fairly obvious: scholars who actively study the internal logic of social networks know much about how they function and how they interact with people’s lives off line. Research of this sort ought to be taken into account and used in developing a research methodology for using Internet materials as an empirical base.

Short questionnaire

28 years old.

I work a lot on the Internet: I have my own website devoted to the sociology of the city, which I also use as a teaching aid for a course on the same subject.

TATIANA ZOLOTOVA, NATALIA EFIMOVA

1 ‘The blurring of the edges of academic knowledge/texts’ in Internet conditions is to be explained, in our view, by a series of circumstances. Firstly, this sort of attitude to knowledge/texts was already prepared to a certain degree by the peculiarities of the development of twentieth-century culture. The theorists of postmodernism roundly declared that nothing new could be created in the field of culture, that

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the essence of creativity, in their view, is nothing more than playing with pre-existing codes, finding new contexts or connexions for them. In the works of this philosophy the author is transformed from a figure who evaluates events and circumstances into a faceless character ‘outside the game’. As for intertextuality, after starting as a sign of an ‘alien element’ within the text, it gradually turned into a phenomenon of ‘literary banality’.

This tendency has been developed and intensified by the Internet, which has its own response to the problem/category of authorship — the nickname. It must also be remembered that Internet space was largely constructed by members of the younger generation. The particular ‘languages’ that they have developed, the most extreme being ‘Albanian’,¹ and also the ‘rules’ for composing and circulating texts on the Web, may be seen as a sort of protest against the false ‘academicism’, *sc.* conservatism/backwardness of the older (‘learned’) generation.

There have, incidentally, been some recent articles in which young people’s games with the symbols/rules of language (for example, with kanji in Japan) are seen as a phenomenon which develops the tradition (see, for example, the curious article by [Makhnyova 2010: 19]). Overall, the appearance of a sort of quasi-literacy on the Internet may be juxtaposed with the extremely fast rate of renewal of texts, the open access to a vast mass of information and the simplification of communication as a whole.

Beyond doubt, we agree with the editorial committee that in this situation a serious academic text may be encountered on an amateur website and *vice versa*, and about ‘the explosion of materials that are difficult or impossible to classify in terms of the old categories’. However, one can see positive as well as negative aspects to this fact. For one thing, it allows representatives of various schools and tendencies, including academic ones, to find out what people think of their activity in contemporary society(!), and in individual cases perhaps actually change their positions in accordance with a democratisation of the subjects of research and the accessibility of the language of publication.

At the same time the scholarly community is obliged, if it wants to uphold its own status, to maintain and actively defend its position regarding the rules for how a **strictly scholarly text** is to be presented and function on the Net. **In our opinion the only possible way to do this is to create our own websites for various subjects and on them forums for discussing the scholarly significance of the results of one publication or another, together with civil society at its most extensive.** At the moment there are very few such sites. For example, within

¹ The same as Olbanian, see above.

Russian folkloristics this function was for a long time fulfilled by the site of the folklore and post-folklore seminar directed by Professor S. Yu. Neklyudov. It is also essential to conduct focussed work with students in order to recommend really serious sites on a given subject.

2

A scholar has no right 'to behave like an Egyptian priest and keep the nature of his mysteries secret from the people'. This judgment of the French *encyclopédistes* in the eighteenth century remains valid today. We are greatly interested in the possibilities for organising and conducting conferences, seminars, round tables and thesis defences for higher degrees on line, and in the digitisation of the leading academic journals, both metropolitan and provincial. We have frequently discussed the possibility of also conducting teaching seminars for students on line. In our view this would both encourage an improvement in the quality of scholarly research and a growth of interest in the humanities in society.

At the same time an active use of cyberspace is hardly likely to bring about significant changes in the organisation of the academic community or give rise to new forms of existence for it outside the Internet. It certainly accelerates and (to a certain extent) democratises communication. In our experience young people are very enthusiastic about virtual 'manifestations' (blog use, subscriptions to social networks, etc.) on the part of their elders — parents, teachers, supervisors.¹ However, that disregard for formality that is characteristic of Net conversations is not likely to pass into real-life communications: the hierarchy will be preserved.

3

The problem of the reliability of internet material must probably be solved individually in each case. In our own work, when we choose something from the Internet, we are guided by the authority of names and organisations. Preference is given to resources which first existed in paper form and were published. If it is a question of collecting material (we have, for example, had occasion to look for texts of fanfiction, programmers' and users' humour, and so on), then we start by looking at large portals such as <fanfiction.net> or <bash.org>. These are the largest repositories of such material and have a well developed system of review and classification <fanfiction.net> and traditional citation <bash.org>.

There is another situation: using the Internet to obtain teaching materials to supplement the course one is delivering. In this case the resources are collected in advance and recommended to the students along with their reading list.

¹ It is not so clear that the same is true in Britain or the US: the fact that the parents of the younger generation were starting to use Facebook en masse created quite a kerfuffle in the mid-2000s, and in the 2010s, there were signs of a generational divide, with a younger user group concentrated in Twitter. [Editor].

4

Overall, it appears that the academic community must devise a reference system for Internet resources, as was done in the past for works on paper, and require that it be strictly conformed to, at least on new websites constructed within the community.

As for folklorists, the study of questions related to Internet folklore seems to have been a discovery made by the Centre for Russian Folklore in Moscow. We have also mentioned this at the meeting marking the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of that establishment, on 18 November 2010. People working at the Centre have made efforts to find out who was engaged in this sort of research and organise them, by means of special round tables and sections at the First and Second Congresses of Folklorists, round tables organised in association with the State Institute for Art History and the Regional Social Centre for Internet Technology, and conferences such as ‘Folk-art-net: New Horizons of Creativity’.

While the Centre’s first collection of articles on Internet folklore [*Folk-art-net* 2007] laid out the questions that folklorists might engage themselves with and approaches to their study, the second [*Internet i folklor* 2009] offers attempts to specify those phenomena that are connected on the one hand with the presence of traditional folkloric works on the Net (for example, the categories of anonymity, orality, tradition, etc.) and on the other with the particular ways in which they manifest themselves (memes, image boards, trolling, personal diaries, Internet jokes as such, etc.).

A summary of this tendency is provided by [Alekseevsky 2010]. His remarks about the need to study Internet folklore in its diachronic aspect, and to develop a set of research tools for it, are very topical.

These would appear to be the tasks with which folklorists are at present faced:

developing specific ‘Recommendations for the Study of Internet Folklore’; these could take the form of a special publication (with a large print-run and distributed throughout the relevant centres in Russia);

the creation of a special website to make contact with the web community and discuss with its representatives questions relating to the similarities and dissimilarities of traditional and new (Web) folklore.

The fact is that students of Internet folklore are unable to keep up with all the new phenomena that are appearing (as Alekseevsky wrote): virtual culture is developing much more quickly than we would like. New communities appear that express themselves to a great extent not verbally but ‘cinematographically’. The creation of new informational structures on the Net (we have discussed the idea

of a 'Legends of the Internet' website), really interested in moving the subject area forward, would be a partial solution to the problem.

Short questionnaire

Tatyana Zolotova: Middle aged.

The extent to which your work has changed under the influence of the Internet: significantly.

Natalya Efimova: younger generation.

The extent to which your work has changed under the influence of the Internet: it developed on the basis of virtual phenomena.

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FROM THE EDITORIAL BOARD

In contradistinction to some of the other ‘Forums’ published in the journal, which have addressed fairly specific topics, this one focused on an issue that is of pressing concern to the whole of academia, or pretty much so. The changes that have overtaken the way scholars work as a result of the development of the Internet are so radical and wide-ranging that it is scarcely surprising that an energetic discussion resulted — and one that spilled over the framework that the questions had anticipated.

It is equally natural that views of the significance of the Internet should also have diverged.

In part, these are of course traceable to generational factors and to the personal inclinations of those involved in the discussion. It is no surprise to realise that younger scholars have a more creative and flexible attitude to the Web, while older ones tend to be more passive in their attitudes. Thus, when Natalia Mazur asserts that ‘the majority of the problems raised in the questionnaire are for us either a thing of the past or have never arisen,’ it is clear she is speaking for a milieu that is completely at home in the new medium and for which the arguments about the relative merits of online and on-paper publications are about as relevant as discussions about whether metal nibs are superior to goose-

quills. The opposite end of the spectrum is represented by Elena Nosenko-Shtein, who argues that the inert environment and low pay of Russian researchers makes the Internet relatively inaccessible even in Moscow, so that 'internetisation' is for the meantime a minority phenomenon (given the high average ages in the profession, especially in Russian Academy of Sciences institutes). I think most Russian readers (me included) will have found this opinion a bit startling, however, given that most Russian schools now have online links, even way out in the taiga. One is inclined to have the sense that if scholars aren't using the Internet, that's probably because they don't want to.

It should, however, be said that the significance of the Internet for someone in the academic world is strongly dependent on the precise area they work in. For a sociologist who is interested in groups and subcultures in the modern big city, the Internet is obviously a completely legitimate source (indeed, probably the most vital source). Someone working in this kind of area has every right to announce that 'the Internet created a real revolution by overthrowing all the institutional barriers involved in the production of academic knowledge' (Katerina Guba). If one happens to work on Ancient History or Proto-Indo-European, on the other hand, or indeed on the languages and culture of tribal communities in the rain forests of the Amazon or the African savannah, things look very different. In that case, the main thing to be pleased about is that the Internet gives you access to an 'extended personal library' and makes it easy (and cheap) for you to exchange information and ideas with your colleagues all over the world. Yuri Berezkin, someone in this category, writes, 'It seems to me that the influence of the Internet on scholarship has been greatly exaggerated. It is of course a great technical advance, which has made the work of collecting and manipulating information much more efficient than it was before. In the first place, the problem of access to reference materials has been eliminated. [...] This results in a colossal saving of time and effort. But, perhaps, nothing more.'

The discussion made clear that some of the assumptions underlying the questions asked in the 'Forum' (for instance, the claim that 'many questions relating to the perception of scholarly knowledge and the ways in which this functions in the new electronic world have barely been addressed') were quite out of touch with what is actually going on. That said, the way that the discussion was formulated did not actually hinder the development of the discussion, since they goaded those who are in the process of evolving methods of fieldwork using the Internet to describe in detail what they are doing — in a manner that was extremely instructive, and precisely demonstrated that this can no longer be described as untilled soil.

The participants in the discussion attempted to sketch out the architecture of contemporary knowledge production, where servers act as, so to speak, load-bearing walls, while URLs are the cladding. As Natalia Mazur argues, ‘gone are the days of the elemental outpouring of unsystematised information, and instead of enthusiastic individuals we have powerful learned institutions, and if there are not yet continents on the Web, there are at least fairly substantial islands of ordered knowledge, partly thanks to the systematic digitisation of sources dating from before the Internet, and partly to new projects [...] By expanding the opportunities open to us, the Internet has greatly increased what is expected of us. We have lost a whole series of convenient excuses: it is ridiculous to blame the unavailability of literature and sources from abroad (and thus to use this to camouflage our inability or reluctance to read foreign languages) [...] It is becoming less popular to be a *Kulturträger*: thanks to the Internet, Western research is no longer inaccessible, and the original is more reliable than a second-hand account.’

But Mazur is also sensitive to the dangers and difficulties that have gone with the spread of Internet use, particularly among those of the younger and middle generations, ‘who have mastered the Internet, but have not been able to adapt their methodology (and sometimes their professional ethics) to it.’ However, this takes us directly to the questions actually raised in the questionnaire.

1

The first question proved as controversial as one might expect. Roughly speaking, three different standpoints emerged:

1) ‘The alarmist position’. As a matter of fact, although the phrasing of the question itself might have been taken as nudging in this direction, it was only a minority of contributors who chose to express serious anxiety about the effects of online communication. Among them was Elena Nosenko-Shtein, who writes, ‘I suppose that the dilution of academic knowledge will continue in future. [...] Among the negative consequences we must count the wide dissemination of parascientific, semi-scientific, and downright anti-scientific writings, which not only has a negative effect on an audience which is not prepared for them, but is harmful to scholarly research and to the image of scholarship, including especially the social sciences as a whole.’ Igor Alimov lays the responsibility for ensuring that the Internet makes available reliable academic materials and serious scholarly studies squarely on the state. ‘One cannot compel a scholar to look at the Internet, but one can provide the means for the regular and adequate publication on the Web of the results of research (even if only in the humanities), and this requires a certain expenditure of funds which only the state can afford — assuming, that is, that it understands the importance and necessity of such expenditure.’

2) The majority of participants in the discussion treated the alleged problem of ‘the dilution of the boundaries of academic knowledge’ on the Internet fairly calmly. Let us term this group the ‘realists’. They quite justly remarked that if the Web has contributed to the dissemination of dubious materials, then it in no sense has a monopoly of these:

‘Of course the Internet provides previously unheard-of possibilities for the distribution of parascientific and pseudoscientific texts, in the area of ethnology and folklore as much as in any other, but it is not the reason for their appearance, which is not specific to our day. People’s attitudes towards them and their role in the consciousness of society are indeed a serious problem of culture and *Weltanschauung*, but a different sort of problem,’ writes Mikhail Matlin.

‘The Internet is admittedly a very weakly differentiated informational space, in which high-quality knowledge is mixed up with informational garbage, where mass, specialised and personal communication are interwoven, where science rubs shoulders with parascience and so on. But this, in reality, is characteristic not only of the Internet, but of modern communications in general,’ observes Andrei Alekseev.

‘Once the first information shock was over, it became clear that the borders of ‘scholarliness’ have remained unchanged: they are determined as before by the inner laws of that school of learning to which the author regards himself as belonging, and certainly not by where the material is published.’ (Natalia Mazur).

‘I do not see a great difference between the blurring of the edges between ‘scholarly’ and ‘non-scholarly’ texts on paper or in electronic form [...] some academic and perfectly respectable publications in Russia sometimes publish texts of such a quality that no decent professional site would accept them. On the contrary, self-respecting Internet resources are much more fastidious in their choice of texts for publication, not least because they are much more widely read than the said academic journals, many of which serve exclusively as a platform for publication, but not for reading and discussion,’ Anna Zhelnina comments.

The ‘realists’ argue that the criteria of scholarly quality that already exist are entirely appropriate for use with reference to Internet publications also. Take, for instance, Maria Akhmetova’s contention that a scholar who would not cite a questionable printed edition will be no more likely to cite a questionable online resource, or Anna Zhelnina’s argument that the content of any publication, the reputation of a given writer and of his or her institution, not to speak of the reputation of the site itself, are all of importance to its status, and such characteristics do not simply ‘vanish’ once material is

online. Mikhail Krasikov goes so far as to claim that amateur or dilettante material simply *could not* appear on a proper academic site; one might compare Ilya Utekhin's equally categorical assertion: 'The existing academic norms for citation and 'collaborative filtration' by the efforts of the professional community are sufficient to maintain an acceptable level of content and authenticity. As for stupidities, traditional paper technology is not proof against them (even in learned journals).'

3) Finally, the 'optimists' see the very blurring of boundaries as something positive. As Tatiana Zolotova and Natalia Efimova sees it, this is a kind of experimental space for discursive communication: the Internet 'allows representatives of various schools and tendencies, including academic ones, to find out what people think of their activity in contemporary society(!), and in individual cases perhaps actually change their positions in accordance with a democratisation of the subjects of research and the accessibility of the language of publication.'

Other participants in the discussion see the situation as a kind of challenge to which academics need to respond: in Roman Leibov's words, the future is likely to hold not further erosion of boundaries, but a kind of restructuring of the frame of intellectual debate. For his part, Ivan Grinko welcomes the opportunities for popularisation that the Internet seems to promise. Katerina Guba, reflecting on the mechanisms of assessment and selection operating in the academic world, anticipates that the Internet will in due course work just as well as traditional 'paper' journals. 'If we bear in mind on of the chief questions of the sociology of science, what is responsible for success (content or institutional correctness), communication in blogs is more inclined to the position of content being more important. Everyone has the chance of being read, without needing to have an outstanding c.v. [...] For the time being we can observe a situation in which traditional social science with its measure of achievement in the form of published texts that have passed through its licensing procedures exists separately. The question remains whether academic communication is taking place through these articles and books, or whether it has been transferred to another field, which at first sight is supposed to do without a high entrance fee for participation in the discussion. The new means of communication really do suppose an absence of institutional barriers, but this does not at all mean that everyone will be heard.'

2

It is entirely to be expected that almost no wholly negative views of the Internet's impact on communication in the scholarly world emerged; even Valentina Metalnikova's reference to the fact that a scholar's reputation may now be related to his or her online presence is followed by the disclaimer 'but then, it was not unknown

before for a researcher to be esteemed more for his or her ‘packaging’ rather than for any real contribution to scholarship’.

More widely shared was the opinion that online communication has not really changed anything fundamental about interaction in the scholarly world and the structure of this.

‘I do not think that the Internet has had any effect on ‘academic hierarchies’. The same applies to scholarly communities. These embrace people engaged in similar activities and holding compatible views, or at least not regarding each other as enemies. What has the Internet to do with this?’ Yuri Berezkin asks.

At the same time, even some ‘sceptics’ do acknowledge that a gradual process of change does seem to be in train.

‘It seems that everyone is equal on the Web, as they are in the bathhouse. But in reality there is no equality in the bathhouse, nor on the Web (nor indeed anywhere else!). Schools attached to traditional scholarly institutions are still authoritative. The former hierarchies do not become irrelevant, but **alongside them** there arise Internet communities, where (particularly on forums) one can find new information, exchange opinions on particular questions, ask for help in discovering the required facts, and so on,’ Mikhail Krasikov opines.

‘It is most unlikely that web platforms will replace “live” conferences and seminars in the foreseeable future, but they are already supplementing them to an important extent by overcoming geographical and language barriers between participants,’ Darya Radchenko observes.

Likewise, Tatiana Zolotova and Natalia Efimova see the likely outcome of internet communication more in terms of speedier communication and more democratic contacts (at least up to a point), rather than in terms of radically new types of social organisation or non-online activity.

However, most of the participants do take the development of online communication as a positive development. Thus, Michael Burawoy, rather than addressing the questions, simply lists the web projects that he has been involved in as President of the International Sociological Association, including a multi-lingual newsletter, blogs, a Facebook page and so on. Larisa Fialkova sees the dissemination possibilities from the other way round, describing how the Internet has provided a way round the constant time-lag that used to be a nightmare for those in remote places in the past.

For Ivan Grinko, it is not the existence of online scholarly communities that is a cause for complaint, but the fact that there are not nearly enough of these: ‘Considering that it was the learned

societies that were the driving force behind the development of ethnology, one should hardly expect negative consequences from their current renaissance. One should not be afraid of their virtuality: they can fulfil their function of transmitting and popularising academic knowledge, and they are fulfilling it. [...] One must not forget that independent evaluation is also an important aspect of communication over the Web. [...] The viability of ideas and theories, and, indeed the level of an individual's scholarship, can only be verified in the course of the day-to-day independent assessment of his work by his colleagues and ordinary lovers of the subject. To sum up, one can only welcome the appearance of such societies, although they remain fewer than one might wish.'

Anna Zhelnina — unlike some members of the older generations — considers that the Internet in fact already has its own hierarchies, something that, in her terms, is to be welcomed: the medium helps young scholars to make their mark. She sees the likely effect of search engines as contributing to a rise of interdisciplinarity, and the further development of urban studies, European studies, which will in due course replace the sociology and anthropology of the urban environment. For his part, Vladimir Ilyin sees the erosion of boundaries between the academic world and the world beyond as entirely to be welcomed: 'The blurring of the edges of scholarly discourse on the Internet, thanks to the intervention of common knowledge and common sense, forces researchers in the humanities and social sciences to conduct their discussions not only in the hothouse conditions of their departments and conferences, but also engage directly with the motley and multifaceted society that is the object of their studies, and find a common language with those who, though formally remote from the discipline, are nevertheless the potential consumers of its output. [...] In other words, the Internet undermines the tempting formula 'scholarship for scholars', which is only possible when they have guaranteed funding without unnecessary irritating questions of the sort 'who needs it?' from politicians, bureaucrats, journalists and the public at large. The logic of democratisation means that the fruits of social science must be acknowledged by members of society who are for the most part without any special education in that sphere.'

Others vehemently oppose this interpretation, emphasising that it is vital to maintain the boundaries between the academic and non-academic worlds. Igor Alimov is one of these, insisting that it is essential to maintain 'scientific clubs of one sort or another, where scholars can share opinions, argue and carry on discussions'. But there should be strict limits: 'This sort of club must be semi-private, that is, there must be strict limitations on the scope of the ordinary user's participation, for example, to take part in conversations. By all means let him read, but let him not interfere' (a number of other

commentators say similar things in their answers to question 1). It would appear that the subject area of a person's research is fundamental to his or her perspective on this particular issue: a sociologist who sees the Internet as an ideal source of primary material is bound to look differently on the medium to a scholar who works on medieval Chinese manuscripts.

Ekaterina Guba also warns of the dangers that go with the disappearance of accustomed boundaries: 'The vision that the academic world will evolve digitally, making texts available with open access, looks like a means of overcoming the institutional barriers which a text must normally pass through before it becomes academic knowledge. [...] However this state of freedom can also be seen as a destructive force capable of destroying the academic world to which we are accustomed. This is connected with the enormous increase in outlay when choosing the texts that are necessary for one's own research.' Yet Guba goes on to suggest that these dangers are of a rather abstract kind; at present, new forms of online textuality are not sufficiently developed to present a challenge to traditional forms of academic communication.

3

In answer to the third question, the participants again divided into their traditional three groups, but the divisions were still more fuzzy than before, and the positions were more complementary than conflicting.

Thus, the contributors in the 'wary' category (such as Igor Alimov) see the Internet as an excellent way of orienting in terms of the information available, but not a good way of deciding what might be reliable (high-quality online editions and libraries aside). As Mikhail Krasikov points out, only third-rate individuals (and scholars) could possibly rely wholly on the medium: 'trust but check' must be the watchword. Scholars of the older generation tend to rely on their traditional resources for fact-checking: thus, Elena Nosenko-Shtein points out that she always consults printed books as a first recourse when checking information that she has found on the Net.

Ellen Rutten, on the other hand, has quite concrete objections to certain online materials, relating, for example, to the unreliability of resources such as Google Search. While reliant perforce on Google for collecting information, she is at the same time aware of its limitations, but she has still to find a superior alternative.

Another group of contributors essentially consider the Internet an autonomous resource. Among these is Maria Akhmetova, who points out that if the Internet allows inert copying, it also permits one to establish where this practice has been employed and what the original source was. She looks forward to a time when 'internet study' will be among the essential forms of skills training that make up 'sources

study'. Darya Radchenko also points out the Internet's capacities as a resource for checking information, as well as a repository of suspect and corrupted materials.

The group of 'enthusiasts', on the other hand, long left behind the sound of rustling pages and the clang of cold type. For them, online publishing is primary. Ivan Grinko, for example, points to editions on the Web that simply could not be reproduced in paper form, such as the online encyclopedia 'Ethnologue: Languages of the World'.¹

While acknowledging the due degree of caution needed when one employs Internet sources, one is still forced to agree with Vladimir Ilyin's prediction that the medium is generating a 'devaluation' of print. 'Amongst students there is a growing number of people who pick up an ordinary book or journal only when there is no alternative. For them a text which has not been uploaded to the Internet does not exist. This generation is not making the weather in scholarship yet, but very soon it will inevitably supplant the bearers of the culture of the printed word.' In the meantime, today's academic publishers still carry out a conservative role and are delaying this process of devaluation, but they will hardly succeed in arresting it for good. Of course this does not mean that books will vanish entirely, given that the rapid turnover of e-formats means that texts still have to be printed out for archiving purposes. And in any case, editions on paper will retain their historical value — there are, after all, scholars who specialise in the study of manuscripts.

Recognising the inevitability of a shift to electronic means of communication and online publication, our contributors also point to various concrete steps that should be taken to accompany this process. These primarily relate to the issue of harmonising the citation system, as in the case of references to printed materials (a point raised by Tatiana Zolotova and Natalia Efimova). Another essential is to rethink our methods for preparing students: as Anna Zhelnina points out, the capacity to retrieve information systematically and independently is vital, and those teaching them should be prepared to give advice and to suggest selection criteria, and to make sure that students are aware of the characteristics and limitations of the medium.

4

The implied claim in Question 4 that scholars have not pondered sufficiently on the Internet as a source of primary materials was certainly not borne out by the answers to that question. As Anna Zhelnina points out, a search on Google Scholar using the keywords 'Internet' and 'social networks' will raise over 19,000 hits of materials from Russian scholars alone. The answers themselves also provided

¹ It should, all the same, be pointed out that this edition has also simultaneously appeared in print form: see the information on the website, <<http://www.ethnologue.com/>>.

plenty of evidence of reflection on this topic and of willingness to share it with colleagues.

The most obvious subject for reflection was use of the Internet as a kind of substitute for fieldwork. As Maria Akhmetova points out, the medium may be no substitute for face-to-face contact, but it does allow one to collect an enormous amount of material on different practices and texts, turns of phrase, etc. (and to come to conclusions about regional distribution) — all while sitting at one's own desk.

Other ruminations concerned the system of storing information collected on the Web. As David MacFadyen argues, the material on the Web is intrinsically ephemeral; further work is certain to consist in the effort to establish what is worth long-term preservation, and sift the peripheral from the central. Darya Radchenko also points to the instability of online resources — the rapid vanishing of internet folklore from the electronic airwaves, for instance. As Larisa Fialkova reminds us, it is essential to note the date when material was last accessed, and to be scrupulous about obtaining permission from bloggers to cite material that they have 'published', just as one would with other types of informant.

Scholars who regularly use online materials and resources have grasped that the Internet is, as Vladimir Ilyin puts it, a kind of 'parallel' social universe, and hence a 'parallel' space for fieldwork — no less useful than the traditional spaces for this, but with its own peculiarities. It can be used for intensive types of discussion — so, blogs and social networks can be spaces for online interviews, perhaps even touching on topics that would ordinarily be taboo. Newspaper and magazine sites can be employed for material collection too, and it is possible to create one's own focus groups.

At the same time, we should always bear in mind the social and generational profile of different users, not to speak of their degree of familiarity with the virtual world, not to speak of the fact that — as Mikhail Krasikov reminds us — 'every *Homo interneticus* also has a real life, and Internet discourse, important though it may be, is not his only discourse, which means that the whole arsenal of the traditional methods of cultural anthropology should also without fail be brought to bear on the work.' Anna Zhelnina also touches on this problem: 'There is a great risk that the results of research conducted on materials from social networks will be presented as universally applicable.' That said, if one starts out with a clear perception of the specificities of the Internet as a research field, and without undue expectations of the results, then what emerges can be perfectly valid. As Andrei Alekseev puts it: 'It is to be understood that there is a very specific representation of the *socium* here. For example, so-called interactive surveys are known to create a false impression of the real correlations between social features and opinions. But it may be

perfectly adequate for creating a typology of phenomena and processes and bringing to light the incipient tendencies of Internet use. Special corrective procedures are obviously needed to monitor the ‘picture of the world’ on the Net. At the same time, given a plurality of reflected images, aberrations may be in some way self-correcting.’

People who are mainly concerned to research language and text note that the Internet has its own characteristics, not present in other media — among these, as Irina Nazarova notes, are emoticons such as the ‘smiley’, and linguistic practices such as ‘Albanian’. For her part, Darya Radchenko points to the fact that internet communications of the kind found in blogs, chats, and forums can exist simultaneously as oral and written texts — as named in the formula ‘oral written communication’.

The specificities of the interaction of scholars and informants when one undertakes internet research emerged as another topic of discussion (one also in part addressed in answer to earlier questions). As it emerges, this type of relationship is a little different from communication in a direct sense. To begin with, the presence of the observer does not distort the performance situation in the way that would happen in a ‘live performance’ situation (see Darya Radchenko’s remarks). As Ilya Utekhin puts it, this is ‘the naïve researcher’s dream field, unspoilt by any influence of the observer!’

It goes without saying that this plus is also a minus — those not present are in a weaker position when it comes to interpreting the full implications of the utterance (as Utekhin goes on to point out, as does Anna Zhelnina, who talks of the ‘vacuum’ in which the sources exist when online — though this can be corrected if the researcher chooses to read or think round the situation.

Some of the commentators also point to new types of social relationship. For Ilya Utekhin, this is a new type of everyday reality and social institution; for Darya Radchenko, a space for the development of novel concepts of ‘locality’ that are network- rather than geography-based. At the same time, virtual communities always have the capacity to turn into real ones (an instance of this would be the ‘Arab revolutions’ of 2011). But of course, it is not just political protests where this kind of transformation can occur. As Anna Zhelnina points out, business and professional activity has also the capacity to mutate in these new communicative circumstances, and that is a point that social scientist will ignore at their peril.

In sum, I think it is possible to say that the humanities and social sciences are very effectively dealing with the challenge that has been thrown to them by IT communication. Of course, we have to bear in mind that our sample is skewed by the very nature of the discussion

(and the fact that it was organised by email); the kind of Muscovite humanities scholar mentioned by Elena Nosenko-Shtein, who has reached late middle age without ever touching a computer, still less logging on to the Internet, would hardly have been inclined to take part. But it's fair to say that kind of person's days are numbered in any case.

As always, we are very grateful to all our contributors for taking part.

Valentin Vydrin

*The comments by participants writing in Russian were translated
by Ralph Cleminson.*

The afterword was translated by Catriona Kelly.