Editorial

Digital Life

A recent cover painting for The New Yorker depicts a family (Dad, Mom, two teenagers) on a beach in a tropical bay. A fifth person seen only in shadow is taking a photo of this memorable vacation moment. None of the family are looking up; they are looking down, all busily texting away, updating their Facebook pages, or whatever. This clever play on overlapping media (painting, photography, cellphones, and apps) reveals that, in fact, nobody is there. They are images only, physically and mentally. They are elsewhere. They have gone digital. This is what McLuhan meant when he said the electronic age was the exteriorization of the nervous system.

This issue, then, examines, in several case studies, what we have become in digital life, for better or for worse. On the positive side, Steven High, Jessica Mills, and Stacey Zembrzycki, in “Telling Our Stories/Animating Our Past,” see enormous new collaborative possibilities in the application of new media to doing oral or public history. In the many debates on history and memory embodied in monuments, photographs, and so on, much of the meaning-making function has now shifted over to the responses of the viewer. Do the new media significantly change this? How are such responses to be evaluated? Or are they a further mediated displacement of memory itself?

Barbara Schneider in “Blogging Homelessness: Technology of the Self or Practice of Freedom?” draws upon Foucault’s thought as she reports upon a homeless blogger in a larger project on social marginalization. In her study here, Schneider steers a delicate dialectic between Foucault’s notions of “technologies of the self” and “care of the self.”

Heather Molyneaux, Susan O’Donnell, and Mary Miliken, in “Staying Socially Connected with Video Communication: A Case Study,” perhaps inadvertently show how social relationships become remediataed through digital media. This has both positive and negative aspects: here positive in the Canadian technological nationalist sense of connection through technology, but negative in raising questions about what social connection is really about.

Moving to different aspects of social life, Matt Stahl and Leslie Meier examine the destabilizing impact of digitalization on music industry practices in “The Firm Foundation of Organizational Stability: The 360 Contract in the Digitalizing Music Industry.”

In an age of what in France is called “Teffet People,” how do gender norms and media representations combine to impact upon female politicians? This is what Catherine Lemarier-Saulnier and Mireille Lalancette examine in their article “La Dame de fer, la Bonne Mère et les autres : une analyse du cadrage de la couverture médiatique de cer-
taines politiciennes québécoises et canadiennes.” Not surprisingly, the increased emphasis on personalization is found to reinforce familial norms, and for men as well.

In a Research in Brief, Duncan Low contrasts the various promised “cultural benefits” attached to the Vancouver Winter Olympics. He finds that in the whirlwind of big media coverage, these came utterly to naught. Low’s report is a warning for those who think such events are occasions to sneak in some “high culture” for the sporting masses.

Finally, given all the coverage, at least in Québec, of the student tuition strikes that have shaken colleges, universities, and provincial politics since the so-called Maple Spring, we publish the recent manifesto “Nous sommes avenir / Share the Future,” produced by, if not the largest, the most vocal of the three student unions. As part of the ensuing Commentary, Editorial Board member Stuart J. Murray raises some disturbing questions about the impact of the digital life on our use and sense of language, flattening it into a stream of banalities. And former CJC editor Kim Sawchuk provides some needed economic and educational context for the “carré rouge” movement.

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