

## Call for Abstracts for Issue 14 (Winter 2022)

### CODES

#### Power and Subversion

With the fourteenth issue of *On\_Culture* we want to explore the conceptual potentials of codes and the cultural work that codes do in both analog and digital spheres. In the analog realm, the term 'code' is often theorized with reference to certain rules, norms, rituals within a specific social (Chandler, 2017) or narrative frame (Barthes – structuralism, Genette – formalism), or as the transmitter of meaning in language (Jakobson, 1959). In this context, codes are seen as underlying structures, communicative conventions (Eco, 1972) which need to be understood to communicate and convey information appropriately or to be able to read certain social situations. As such, codes can also be understood as the element that not only forms but also predestines interaction in and with the digital. Thus, with reference to their semiotic dimension they may be considered the distilled representation of the functionality of social processes in analog and digital realms.

We approach the issue through a conceptual lens of a cultural understanding of codes that facilitates a closer look at notions of the digital at the same time. The use of the concept in cultural studies has been viewed critically, e.g. by Corner, who emphasizes amongst other things the general lack of precision when dealing with interrelations of multiple code-systems in the same object of knowledge (1980). Therefore, this issue seeks to explore where the concept of codes can be of added value as a heuristic tool for the study of culture in the digital and the analog beyond metaphorical uses of the term. Our focus is on the processual character of codes and therefore their performative potential. The issue aims to shed light on the questions: "What do codes do?" and "What do we do with codes?"

'Code' implies the processes of encoding and decoding messages. Hence, it is of major significance in the realms of communication and understanding. As a representation, codes allow for the interpretation of the relationship to the signified that they suggest. Oftentimes the knowledge of codes stays implicit. The code finds itself at the threshold between the visible and the invisible. Being able to read the code and use it is therefore literacy, is therefore empowerment. The competence of meaning-making facilitates agency. It bares the potential of actively engaging with codes — actively 'programming' them as a representation of ideological or normative stance and therefore imposing them on others — or subverting them by disobeying the code or by altering existing codes. In this sense, a handshake can first become an element of social protocol and then an anti-social gesture itself. The act of covering one's face, which in the past could be observed repeatedly as a point of discursive/institutional contention, can now be seen as an act of responsibility for collective health. Similarly, subverting a dress code can become a political statement/a means of political protest and linguistic code-switching, a postcolonial gesture (Ashcroft et al., 2004).

We invite scholars from a diverse spectrum of disciplines — from anthropology, linguistics, literature studies, philosophy, cultural sociology, political sciences, law and the arts to information sciences and

digital humanities — to contribute to this issue and engage in an interdisciplinary reflection on the concept of code, its limits and potentials.

Possible topics include but are not limited to:

- Encryption and decryption, notions of secrecy
- Intersections of the social and the digital: How does the interaction with codes in the digital shape life outside of the internet?
- Digital and social literacy
- De- and re-coding as culturally subversive acts: code switching as postcolonial gesture, breaking the code
- Questions of representation
- Messages and communication
- Codes and (data) storage techniques
- Codes in law and nation-building (civil code): written and unwritten law, codes as law
- Codes and ethics
- Codes: between visible and invisible
- The performative power of coding
- Codes in popular culture
- Who makes the code? Questions of power, authorship, agency, questions of access, hermeneutic traditions, cultural dynamics, role of cultural convention and social institution
- Translational aspects of codes: Translation of the digital into the analog realm, translation of social principles and norms into the digital
- Codes in the life sciences: the genetic code
- (De-)coding and epistemology
- Gender codes

If you are interested in having a peer reviewed academic article featured in this issue of *On\_Culture*, please submit an abstract of 300 words with the article title, 5–6 keywords, a short biographical note, and your email address to [content@on-culture.org](mailto:content@on-culture.org) (subject line “Abstract Submission”) no later than **February 15, 2022**. You will be notified by **March 1, 2022** whether your paper proposal has been accepted. The final date for full paper submissions is **June 1, 2022**.

Please note: *On\_Culture* also features *\_Perspectives*, a section devoted to shorter, creative pieces pertaining to each issue topic. These can be interviews, essays, opinion pieces, reviews of exhibitions, analyses of cultural artifacts and events, photo galleries, videos, works of art... and more! These contributions are uploaded on a rolling basis. Interested in contributing? Send your ideas to the Editorial Team at any time: [content@on-culture.org](mailto:content@on-culture.org)

### **About *On\_Culture*: *The Open Journal for the Study of Culture***

*On\_Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture* (ISSN: 2366-4142) is a biannual, peer-reviewed academic e-journal edited by doctoral researchers, postdocs, and professors working at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at Justus Liebig University Giessen. It provides a forum for reflecting on the study of culture. It investigates, problematizes, and develops key concepts and methods in the field by means of a collaborative and collective process. *On\_Culture*

is dedicated to fostering such engagements as well as the cultural dynamics at work in thinking about and reflecting on culture.

The journal consists of three sections: peer-reviewed academic *\_Articles*, as well as *\_Essays*, and the aforementioned *\_Perspectives*. *On\_Culture* brings new approaches and emerging topics in the (trans)national study of culture 'on the line' and, in so doing, fills the gap\_\_ between 'on' and 'culture.' There are numerous ways of filling the gap, and a plurality of approaches is something for which the journal strives with each new issue.

Please note: As a commitment to the open access to scholarship, *On\_Culture* does not charge any Article Processing Charges (APCs) for the publication of your contribution.

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