Responses

Androids, cyborgs and connectivity

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I first heard about cyborgs in 1989. I was 17 years old, and I had a discussion about science fiction movies with a friend. *Blade Runner* was the best science fiction movie ever made, he claimed. I had never heard of the movie, and I just nodded my head. "The great thing about *Blade Runner*," he said, "is that the robots are not actually robots, they are replicants." "They are machines, yet, they are so human," he explained. And he enthusiastically continued; "It is almost as if they are more human than humans." I had no idea what he was talking about, so I asked him what a replicant was. He explained that they were machines made out of synthetically produced biological material. "They are not cyborgs, they are androids," he explained. I was not into science fiction at all. In fact, I could not even turn on a computer at that time, so all the talk about robots was confusing. But I had learned two cool words—android and cyborg.

A few years later I watched *Terminator 2* on VHS, and I was astonished. I especially remember the scene when a nude Arnold Schwarzenegger or the T-800 Terminator arrives, and how we experience the surroundings through the eyes of the cyborg. How he—or it—is scanning people at a bar, before he finally finds a biker matching his size, and mechanically demands: "I need your clothes, your boots and your motorcycle".

Today, androids and cyborgs are no longer future imaginaries in science fiction movies. To some extent, mobile devices, our iPhones and Androids, have turned us into the cyborgs. By using the term cyborg, I do not refer to people with machine implants such as pacemakers or a cochlear implant, nor do I refer to Donna Haraway's feministic concept of cyborg (Haraway 1991). I simply refer to the fact that we by now have made our bodies and senses more or less continually connected to the worldwide web. Our mobile devices have become technological extensions of our bodies and senses, whether they are perfectly placed in our hands, or we carry them in a pocket or a handbag. Our symbioses with them make us able to intentionally or unintentionally communicate with the rest of the human world, almost everywhere and at any time. Hence, we have become communicative and performative cyborgs. Reading this special issue of *Cultural Analysis* gave me four reflections on everyday life as a cyborg.

Digital extensions of human spheres of communication

In the abstract to his article, Robert Glenn Howard writes that "Once abstract, theories of human communication as 'webs of signification' have been rendered material by digital networks. " (p. 116). In this way, he elegantly refers to Clifford Geertz's famous statement that "man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun", and Geertz's claim that culture is "those webs" (Geertz 1973, 5). By drawing his analysis on Geertz's statement, Howard argues that the quite concrete intertextual and intermedial traceable links constituting online

webs are not significantly different from offline webs of signification. They just become more visible. He demonstrates this by identifying a number of layers of action working together in a post from a web-forum on guns and ammunition.

Taking the reference to Geertz seriously, it would of course be impossible to delimit the unraveling of the webs of significance to merely include online practices. Howard's analysis shows how these webs also are spun out of offline practices. The post analyzed is constituted around a short video clip of a military drill in downtown Miami, filmed by a mobile device, and remediated several times. And, while Howard is first and foremost occupied with what is going on online, he also suggests that this post could perfectly well be shown as part of a conversation in a bar. In this sense, both what could be termed the source utterance (the filming of the military drill) and (an imagined) target utterance (the bar conversation) are layers of action in the interface between online and offline (cf. Bauman 2004, 133). Howard's empirical case demonstrates how the mobile devices (either used as a film camera or as a video screen) work as tools for extending what Mikhail Bakhtin termed *spheres of communication in* both time and space (cf. Bakhtin 1986). Hence, the article not only demonstrates how webs of signification have become visible; it also demonstrates the unpredictability of these webs, and it further documents in quite concrete ways how everyday spheres of communication are digitally extended and constantly remediated.

Everyday performativity

The digital extension of everyday spheres of communication of course also implies a performative dimension. I have therefore often wondered why there has been a tendency in folkloristic studies on netlore to focus upon the circulating forms, rather than the performative practice of posting and sharing. Both the widespread use of Dawkins' term *meme* and the viral metaphor in such studies implicates that the cultural content is circulating seemingly by itself. Critical to this terminology, Henry Jenkins has remarked the simple fact that a virus is most often passed from person to person unintentionally, while posting is a social act. The act of posting thus has agency (Jenkins et al. 2013, 16–23). The emphasis on memes and sharing as a viral process gives associations to a pre-von Sydowian understanding of migratory folklore. But, as Anthony Bak Buccitelli has pointed out, social media are performative media. Facebook facilitates narcissism, in the sense that our posting is encouraged by the expectations to get feedback from the audience, as comments or "likes" (Buccitelli 2012, 60). Hence, posting and sharing are performative acts (cf. Peck 2014). We perform our everyday lives online, and folklorists and cultural scholars are trained to study such performative practices. Andrew Peck's contribution in this special issue is therefore a highly-welcomed contribution to the study of the everyday life practice of posting.

Peck points out that there has been a shift of social norms towards an acceptance of sharing the mundane. Consequently, everyday life practices become more visible (p. 33). This acceptance has also brought a new mode of performativity into our everyday lives. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Snap-

chat are perfectly designed for everyday life performances. These performative media interfere with situations that used to be non-performative, or at least had a very limited audience. A couple of years ago the *New York Daily News* wrote that a New York restaurant had lately experienced an increase in complains on slow waiters, even though it had cut down on the menu and added more staff. The cause was identified when the restaurant systematically started to observe the interaction between the waiters and the diners. It was the smartphones. People regularly asked the waiters to take group photos, and the diners also used in average three minutes in taking and posting photos of the food before they started to eat.[1] The dishes looked delicious on Instagram, but the digital performance had turned them cold.

Snapchat and Instagram also turn what used to be backstage into a performative front (cf. Goffman 1959). We post pictures from our kitchens, bathrooms and bedrooms. The Norwegian blogger Caroline Berg Eriksen, known as Fotballfrue (Soccer player's wife) is a professional Instagrammer with more than 350 000 followers. Her Instagram account is dominated by carefully composed pictures, for the most part of her posing in sponsored outfits. But, at November 28, 2013 she made an exception. She picked up her smartphone and shot a selfie in her underwear and posted it. The caption to the picture reads: "I feel so empty, and still not 4 days after [giving] birth"[2] The audience was overwhelmed by her slender body and her flat, washboard stomach. The picture got nearly 33 000 likes. What was, according to Berg Eriksen, an impulsive act had made her an international sensation.

She guested «Good Morning America» on ABC, and within a few days, she had 100, 000 new followers. At the same time, she was heavily criticized for underpinning an unhealthy and even abnormal image of the female body. She later explained that the picture was taken for her mother, and that her mother had encouraged her to post it.[3] Even though Berg Eriksen was a professional blogger, she was seemingly unprepared for the effect of turning her most intimate backstage into an online front. Yet, she also took notice of the success, and three years later—after giving birth to her second child—she repeated it. The picture was this time well-composed, and the caption was a 220 word long defend speech.[4] The post got 19 000 likes, but caused no debate. The calculated transformation of backstage to front was no longer a sensation.

My point with these two examples is to turn the attention from the posted form, towards the breakthrough into digital performance, or the moment when we pick up our smartphones, and signals to the audience: "Hey, look at me"! I'm on(line)!" (cf. Bauman 2004, 9). There are still few folkloristic studies on participatory media that have emphasized the performative moment when offline situations become online performances. However, Maria Eriksson and Anna Johansson's article in this special issue of *Cultural Analysis* brings substantial contributions to the study of performativity in the interface between offline and online practices. They simply turn the question the other way around, and show how the online music player Spotify attempts to produce a set of modes of intimacy and facilitates for certain kinds of offline performances.

Everyday surveillance

A main topic in this special issue is the dual character of the Internet—the tension between individual freedom and grassroot empowerment on the one hand and consolidation of institutional power and control on the other. Eriksson and Johansson's article discusses music reception through such optics. While other contributions elegantly demonstrate how place and landscape (Buccitelli, Cocq), language (Cocq), diasporas (Ritter) and religion (Gelfgren) are organized in complex interplays between the vernacular and the institutional.

The dual character of digital networks "have penetrated every aspect of many millions of individual daily lives," write Robert Glenn Howard and Coppélie Cocq in the introduction (p. 2). One aspect of this duality is the omnipresent surveillance, facilitated by our symbioses with our smartphones. They leave digital tracks of everything we do, and not only of what we consciously do online. When I write this, I have just returned from a walk in the park, and I have received three messaged on my smartphone: One from Google Maps encouraging me to evaluate my local park, another one from TripAdvisor asking if I am hungry and recommending me a list of restaurants and cafés located close to the park, and a third one from the Samsung Health app informing me that I have reached my daily goal of 10 000 steps. This illustrates not only how we are continually monitored by multinational companies such as Google, TripAdvisor and Samsung, but also how we may use the smartphone for self-monitoring, as an externalized technology of self (cf. Foucault 1988). We have become our own agents of surveillance, co-operating with multinational companies. It has even become possible and widely accepted to use digital devices to monitor our homes and our family, or at least the activities of our children.

Among the questions raised in the introduction to this issue is: "Do new technologies imply an increased safety and security for us citizens, or do they empower institutions with still emerging levels of surveillance?" (p. 3). Even though these articles discuss institutional power, they do not explicitly address this question. A way to reformulate the problem of surveillance into a folkloristic issue may be to ask how dialogical traces of the wide range of surveilling, digital superaddressees are present in everyday utterances and practices (cf. Bakhtin 1986, 126). This is yet to be thoroughly examined by folklorists and cultural scholars.

Everyday modes of connectivity

In the childhood of the worldwide web, the Sandra Bullock movie *The Net* (1995) demonstrated the alienating danger of living a life exclusively online. Bullock's character experienced the hard way that she could not escape from the physical world. The naivety of the technology criticism in the movie is charming. Yet, the moral of the movie is valid—an online life always has an offline dimension. Some 20 years later, it may also be the other way around—an offline life has probably always an online dimension. Almost every human activity in the Western world is in the end connected to the web, not only when we google, use our smartphones to find our way around in a city, use apps to purchase tickets, listen to music or read updated news. We are registered online when we use our plastic cards for pur-

chasing or when we use our electronic keys to our apartments, hotel rooms or offices. The information about our income, taxes, health situation, banking and so on are accessible for us and the authorities through online archive systems. We may even be online, without knowing—the minute we walk out the door we may be caught by internet connected surveillance cameras, or we may be observed by a reconnaissance satellite.

My final remark to this excellent collection of articles concerns the use of the dichotomy *online* and *offline*. These terms are used as contrasts in the introduction and in several of the articles. The contributors do question the dichotomy—Andrew Peck discusses "a blurred boundary between online and offline vernacular practice" (p. 40), while Coppélie Cocq writes about digital practices "in terms of intersection and interplay between online practices and what takes place offline" (p. 102). However, blurred boundary, intersections and interplay intrinsically imply an idea of *online* and *offline* as distinct and separated modes of communication and practice. Without boundaries, there will not be any boundaries to blur, and there is no intersection without distinct entities to intersect.

The mobile devices and all the other numerous ways we are digitally networked infiltrate our everyday spheres of communication to such an extent, that "the world of other's words" we today live in, is genuinely both online and offline (cf. Bachtin 1984, 143). Our culture is networked, and we are cultural cyborgs. Instead of using the terms online and offline, and strive to figure out how these modes are entwined, entangled or interconnected, we have to find terms to

describe how the daily life is constantly connected. One such term could be Sherry Turkle's term *connectivity* (Turkle 2011, 13–17), and I suggest terming the different kinds of more or less conscious, more or less voluntary and more or less intense onlineness of everyday life as (an almost endless variety of) modes of connectivity.

Notes

1 https://www.nydailynews.com/lifestyle/eats/smartphones-blame-slow-service-restaurants-article-1.1879081, downloaded May 27, 2017.
2 https://www.instagram.com/p/hQc3DjAsc7/, downloaded May 27, 2017.
3 http://www.tv2.no/2014/04/01/underholdning/else/fotbollfrue/nyheter/5462716, downloaded May 27, 2017.
4 https://www.instagram.com/p/BKZ65yvA47g/, downloaded May 27, 2017.

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