CULTURAL ANALYSIS

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FORUM ON FOLKLORE AND POPULAR CULTURE

THE INHERITANCE OF THE DIGITAL:
ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACHES TO EVERYDAY REALITIES IN, OF, AND THROUGH DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

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Inheritance of the Digital

In 1975, thirty-two computer hobbyists met in a garage in what would become California's Silicon Valley. This "HomeBrew Computer Club" imagined a future utopia of individually owned computers that would grant everyone access to the technologies that were, at that time, so expensive and technical only institutions could afford them. Club member Bill Gates developed "software" while other members, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, developed the "personal computer." Together they started the digital revolution that would emphasize individual access to information through small and inexpensive individually owned devices (Howard 2012; Wozniak 1984).

In 1977, the U.S. military successfully sent "packets" of on-and-off power fluctuations between computers. Their project was born of a different vision. They wanted a distributed communication system that could survive the imagined nuclear battlefields of the Cold War. The computer code they used not only made it possible to connect computers to each other but it, more importantly, allowed networks to be "internetted" together so long as they adhered to the accepted protocol. That institutionally authorized protocol, Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol or "TCP/IP", is still the basis of all digital networks today (Abbate 1999:130-3). Imagining a digital age that would be dominated by large institutional computing networks, TCP/IP would be the bridge through which these institutional networks could communicate even when other means of communication had failed.

Born of the unlikely coupling of these two very different intentions, the devices that keep us continually networked together today are the inheritance of both a vision of individual freedom and a vision of bomb-proof institutional power. With this dual ideology, a shift in the cultural meaning of information technology occurred, and participatory media became locations for the emergence of diverse, hybrid, and even conflicting voices (Turner 2006). At the same time, however, the technologies that drive our everyday network devices are quietly embedding centralizing institutional interests in, at least, the forms of advertising, and surveillance. This dual heritage has come down to us today through the last 40 years of sustained development of network

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technologies.

Until the early 1990s, "internetting" was primarily an activity for institutional computers and trained computer engineers. In the '90s, an employee of the European science institute CERN created an innovative way for people to share information using TCP/IP. Inspired by the anti-institutional ethos of the HomeBrew computer club, Tim Berners-Lee built and gave away the first internet "browser" based on the cross-platform and very simple computer coding language Hypertext Markup Language or "HTML." So doing, he created what would come to be called the "Worldwide Web": a web of linked pages that were written in this computer code.

The next year, in 1992, the U.S. Congress passed a bill that allowed technology funded by the National Science Foundation or "NSF" to be used in for commercial purposes. Previously, all technologies produced from this U.S. government program could not be used in commerce. TCP/IP had been created by the NSF, so, as a result, it was now available for commercial applications. Seeing a new financial opportunity, a small startup called Mosaic Communications Corporation began searching for funding to create an online gaming network. While seeking those funds, the company produced an internet browser that came to be known as Netscape Navigator. The software exploded in popularity and a rush of new internet users began demanding to both access media through internetted networks.

The 2000s saw these networks penetrating deeper into everyday life through the emergence of mobile network devices. First introduced in 2007, Apple Computer's iPhone ran a variant of the Macintosh operating system and thus enabled the phone to access networks via cellular or other wireless access points just as if a desktop computer. With the advent of this "smart phone," the ethos of individual access to networked information moved from the confines of the desktop computer or laptop computer to the ever-present pocket sized mobile network communication devices that are owned by 88% of South Koreans (the highest in Asia and worldwide), 72%of Americans (the highest in North and South America) (Poushter 2016), and used by 82% of the population in Denmark to access internet access on the move (Eurostat 2017).

Today, mobile devices have placed digital network access into the hands more of us for more of our waking hours than ever before, and, as a result, the dual intentions of digital networks have penetrated every aspect of many millions of individuals' daily lives.

Over twenty years since it started its surge in usage in 1990s, the internet is no longer "new media." It has been around a long time. It is also not extraordinary. Today, the internet is mundane precisely because so many of us pick it up and put it in our pockets everyday—often without even thinking about it. Starting with the realization that digital communication networks are intertwined with our daily lives so deeply that we might not even notice their pervasive influence, this special issue will consider how these network communication technologies are quietly shaping us by shaping our everyday expression.

Researchers of ethnology and folklore have made the study of everyday life

their focus, and those everyday lives are being transformed by continual access to the internet through personal computers, phones, and other mobile devices. As these technologies have become ubiquitous, the questions researchers must ask are not just about how these technologies work or about the media products they disseminate, but about the massive impact digital practices are having and will continue to have in the daily expression of our shared culture.

This special issue addresses some of the new questions that these practices raise for ethnologists and folklorists. For instance, how do digital media empower people to express themselves? How does it affect relations of power and authority? How do participatory media reshape the life-worlds of members of a diaspora community? How do digital technologies affect our understanding of place and space?

As we engage these questions, it is tempting to take the conflicting intentions at the beginning of the digital revolution as a template for understanding our experience today. Many have and still do argue that we are worse or better off because of our network access. These dichotomies play out in many forms. Does the easy access to information structured by the Google Corporation connect us to more neutral information than ever before? Or is it more that the loss of transparent and expert editorial content curation once offered by journalists, academics, and editors has left us adrift in a sea of indigestible data points? Does social media bring together people with different opinions, or does it create a polarization of debates? Do new technologies imply an increased safety and security for us citizens, or do they empower institutions with still emerging levels of surveillance?

These technologies certainly have decentralized power and enabled, in some cases, revolutionary change from the ground up such as was seen in the social-media driven revolutions in the Middle East (compare Howard & Hussain, 2011; Pfeffer & Carley, 2012). Further, high profile cases like that or WikiLeaks (Lindgren & Lundström, 2011) or the power of constant mobile devices that have revealed the daily violence in law enforcement and elsewhere have fueled communal sources of knowledge such as Wikipedia as a genre of the so-called alternative and activist new media (Lievrouw 2011), in contrast to institutionalized knowledge.

Still, even with the many examples of liberatory power through networks, one must have access to be liberated. The role played by and given to digital and mobile technologies raises concerns and questions about how an unequal access to these technologies contributes to expanding gaps between continents, countries, generations and socio-economic groups (Nakamura & Chow-White 2012; Ragnedda & Muschert 2013). Indeed, if the internet plays a major role in democratization processes, then the digital divides are a major issue to be addressed urgently at a global level.

The contributions in this volume do not affiliate to neither cyber-optimism nor technocultural pessimism. Rather, the articles seek to highlight the dynamics and implications of how people engage with the digital.

Ethnographic Approaches to Everyday Realities In, Of, and Through Digital Technologies

Contributors in this volume engage with digital technologies in different manners: in digital communication processes, locative media and participatory culture or for music distribution and languages resources. A common point of departure for these articles in this volume is the dual inheritance of the digital. Through ethnographic studies of everyday digital culture, each contribution explores our shared heritage of these digital visions.

In our first article, Anthony Bak Buccitelli begins to take account of the ways in which digital technologies are playing a central role in the creation of contemporary vernacular understandings of space and place by comparing the spatializing practices of "geocaching" to those involved in the augmented reality game Ingress. Both practices actively construct a user experience of localized real-world knowledge. Ingress, however, seamlessly intertwines the on and off-line worlds. Documenting the ways in which each community of participants establishes important geographic sites in play, Buccitelli documents how Niantic Labs, a Google subsidiary and the makers of Ingress (and of the more recent and more famous Pokemon Go, partly based on features from Ingress), structure and define spatialized notions of cultural heritage for its players.

In the second article, Andrew Peck writes of the interplay between online and offline forms of vernacular practices based on the example of The Slender Man. Through this example, he describes how digital communication technologies have created social norms that encourage the documentation and sharing of everyday behaviors across networks. As everyday life (including a variety of vernacular practices) becomes both more mediated and more visible, a vernacular awareness of these everyday practices encourages collaboration. With this collaboration, however, users begin to develop their own hierarchies of performance, and that awareness then facilitates new forms of vernacular critique.

Next, Christian Ritter offers a nuanced ethnographic study based on long-term face-to-face fieldwork as well as in digital environments. His work examines how participatory media reshape the life-worlds of members of a Moroccan diaspora community in urban Istanbul. Based on the study of Facebook-groups and forums and interviews, he offers a deep understanding of digital communication processes within contemporary diasporas, and his findings reveal the widespread use of participatory media among members of this diasporic community in Istanbul facilitated the emergence of a new realm of lived experience in these individual's life-worlds.

Maria Eriksson and Anna Johansson offer an ethnographic study of the music streaming service Spotify. They explore the idea of free and unlimited access in relation to the prescriptive and normative indications played out in music recommendations. Looking more specifically at the aspects of temporality, functionality and intimacy, they show how music is framed and contextualized in such a way that playlists are suggestive of neoliberal or radical individualist ideologies. Through their findings, we see the freedom of choice and flexibility that Spotify emphasizes while promoting their

online platform are inextricably bound up with institutional control and disciplining of audiences.

Next, Stefan Gelfgren approaches the issues of power, authority, and institutionalized structures in relation to digital practices through an exploration of Christian institutional uses of digital communication. He tracks changing power relations through the changing deployments of digital media. So doing, he reveals the dual nature of the internet – or, "diophysite" to borrow Christian terminology about the nature of the Christ. Gelfgren's study shows how the internet can be a tool for rearranging power structures in the hands of the media skilled actors.

Coppélie Cocq's article explores how the role of experts is challenged and redefined in our contemporary media landscape, based on the study of Indigenous efforts for language revitalization through digital media by Sámi people inhabiting the Arctic area of Sápmi. In her research, she reveals how authority is shaped and contributes to building new structures that complement, question and challenge institutional ones. New players are emerging, highlighting the dysfunctionality and inadequacy of the existing structures. Through interviews and other data, she shows how these initiatives are constitutive, rather than instrumental. Rather than making a significant difference in language revitalization, these initiatives play a significant role in the democratization process for these historically marginalized people.

In our last article, Robert Glenn Howard uses the example of online forums focused on recreational gun use to show how digital networks have rendered personal our webs of communication more visible. As a result of this visibility, approaching communication practices as series of discrete but related media objects can no longer adequately account for the way our webs of signification aggregate the influences of many actors in the network. To address this problem, he proposes that we seek to understand digital network communication as events that emerge in the interaction of heterogeneous volitions.

Taken together, the excellent set of articles in this volume offers new insights into the current state of network communication while still accounting for the powerful forces we of the digital revolution our everyday lives have now inherited.

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Locative Gaming, Folk Geographies, and the Experience of Cultural Heritage[1]

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Abstract

Folklorists and ethnologists have increasingly begun to take notice of the ways in which digital technologies are playing a central role in the creation of contemporary vernacular understandings of space and place (for example, McNeil 2007; 2012; Buccitelli 2013). Yet, like the digital spaces in which much of contemporary folklore is being performed, the possibilities and constraints of the different technological platforms through which these folk geographies are taking shape have not been fully explored. This paper will begin this exploration by comparing the spatial practices of "geocaching" to those involved in the augmented reality game Ingress. In particular, the paper will focus on the ways in which each community of participants establishes important geographic sites in play, with particular attention to how Niantic Inc., a former Google subsidiary and the makers of Ingress, structures and defines spatialized notions of cultural heritage for its players.

Of Portals and Places

In early 2012, the National Intelligence Agency assembled a special team at the European nuclear agency CERN to begin investigating a newly discovered form of matter, known as exotic matter or XM, which had come to light in the wake of the recent discovery of the Higgs-Boson particle. This project, which was named the "Niantic Project," was composed of two NIA agents and eleven subject experts. Along with five scientists, mainly physicists, the team included a semiotician, a theologian, a musician, a sculptor, a stage magician, and Hank Johnson, an archeologist, historian, and "former special forces operative." Through their study, this team determined three things. First, they were able to isolate a pattern in the emission of XM that suggested something like intelligent communication: someone or something, they concluded, was trying to communicate through the patterned pulsation of these particles. Second, that the emission of XM particles was happening on a much larger scale than they had initially supposed. As they studied the phenomenon in greater depth, they began to see that XM particles could be found on a global scale. Yet there too, they found patterns. The particle emissions were "clustered around key sites, places of cultural, intellectual, and religious significance around the world." Finally, they also determined that exposure to XM particles had a very specific effect on human mental function. It "seemed to increase intellectual ability, creativity, and insight in some, but brought out darker aspects of the personality in others" (Niantic Labs 2013).

On November 30th, now known as "Epiphany Night", everything changed. The Niantic

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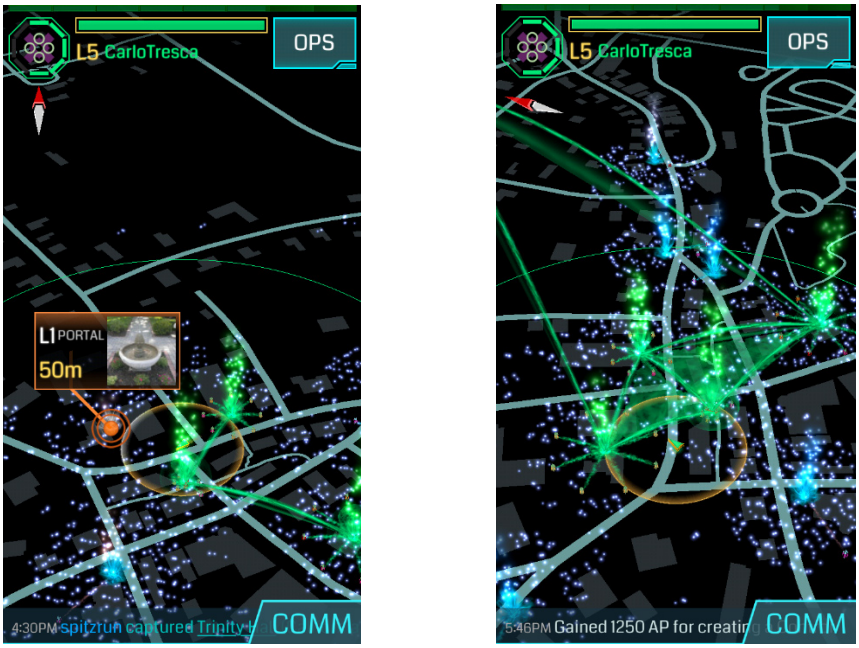
> lab at CERN was exposed to a massive dose of XM radiation, sending the researchers into frenzied bouts of creativity, like Enoch Dalby's musical compositions. Whatever the researchers saw that night irreparably splintered the team: some researchers went on to work for Hulong Transglobal, IQTech, and Visur Technology, while others (like Roland Jarvis) ended up dead. The schism of the team was due in large part to philosophical differences about the true purpose of XM, exacerbated by their exposure to massive quantities of XM through Epiphany Night. To the team members who went on to became the core of the Enlightened faction, the Shaper's influence on sensitive individuals through XM was viewed as the next step in human evolution. For the team members who chose the path of greatest Resistance, the Shaper's influence was in XM [and] was deemed a "Shaper Mind Virus" that must be countered (Andersen 2014).[2]

This is the setting backstory for the 2013 release of the locative augmented reality game *Ingress*. Created by Niantic, a software development company that began as a subdivision of Google in 2010, the game is played primarily using a GPS-enabled application downloaded on to a user's mobile phone.[3] During initial set-up, the player must choose to embrace one of two "factions" in the game, the blue-themed "Resistance" or the green-themed "Enlightened." Depending on the player's chosen faction, s/he will receive specially-tailored information about the "Shapers," the mysterious intelligent beings who are thought to be responsible for the emission of XM. In a nutshell, Resistance members receive information which suggests that the Shapers are an invading alien force, while the Enlightened receive information suggesting that the Shapers are a race of saviors, who are coming to bestow knowledge and meaning upon human life. Regardless of the factional information a player receives, however, gameplay is the same for both factions. The objects of play include taking and defending control of "portals," sites in the physical world from which XM is emitted, and creating "links" and "fields" between portals, XM connections that strengthen the energy and value of portals.

In a certain way then, as it is described in some of Niantic's promotional materials, *Ingress* is a giant digital game of capture the flag. Players must use their mobile devices to locate portals, which are keyed to specific physical sites that can only be accessed once a player is in physical proximity. Then they use their XM weaponry to attack and take control of the portal in the name of the faction. While the game can be played anywhere in the physical world, in-game social groups tend to form around physical areas: counties, cities, or neighborhoods might each have their own Resistance or Enlightened player groups who will work together to take and defend portals, exchange supplies, and create higher-scoring links and fields across larger physical territories.

While folklorists and ethnologists, following Robert Glenn Howard, have already begun to explore the dynamics of institutional-vernacular hybridization in digital spaces (Howard 2008a; 2008b; 2010), it is useful to consider how these dynamics, in turn, structure our everyday cultural understandings of the physical world.[4] There is an important dimension of the *Ingress* platform that suggests this further approach to the study of locative media that is relevant to folklorists and ethnologists: it does not



Figures 1 and 2. The *Ingress* user interface showing the "Pineapple Fountain" portal and two Enlightened "fields," or three-point links between controlled portals, located in Hingham, MA.

just allow access to users who can construct and experience spatialized knowledge through their own annotations and interactions, but it also actively constructs a user experience of localized spatial knowledge. For instance, Robbie Campbell, a 29 year-old restaurant manager from Beaumont, TX told a reporter for National Public Radio in 2014:

> "I'm from a relatively small town. I was born there. And I didn't know until I started playing this game that Thomas Edison actually came to Beaumont and turned on the first generator to power the first electric lights," he says. Campbell found out this history "at a museum that is a portal that I never knew existed before I played this game" (Sydell 2014).

While the role that these games play in shaping user experience of space is perhaps currently most pronounced in *Ingress*, it is a tacit feature of all locative media platforms, especially games.[5] Inasmuch as *Ingress* and other platforms shape user experience with physical spaces in very specific ways, then, I want to suggest that we might usefully consider these games not just through the vehicle of individual user experience but also as spatial "regimes," value-encoded systems of power that play out in the individualized user's experience of space and place.[6] In other words, we must consider the role that augmented reality games, as well as other kinds of locative media, play in setting up the everyday conditions under which users encounter and come to understand spaces and places, how these technologies allow users to shape

those experiences, and how users respond to the conditions set forth in these platforms. Along the lines of the Michel de Certeau's dualization of urban space, I am proposing that we consider not just the vernacular tactics of interaction that are facilitated by locative media applications, but also the institutional forces that strategically structure how users encounter the physical world (de Certeau 1984, 91-110).

In order to do so, this article examines two main examples of digital applications that augment or annotate reality to guide users to specific sites as part of a game: *Ingress* and *Geocaching*. An application that facilitates the practice of "geocaching," a pastime which relies of GPS technology but built on much older traditions of spatial gaming (McNeil 2007), *Geocaching* is a popular mobile phone app. The app allows users to upload information relevant to finding cache sites, as well as a variety of other kinds of user-defined information and discourse. Although in very different configurations, both programs lay out an in-game geography of sites in the physical world through the means of a mobile application that users can access to guide them through physical space. Furthermore, to a greater or lesser degree, each application allows users to take part in the process of geographic construction. Both games also lay out clear but tacit official systems to control how in-game geography is defined and how users can interact with, edit, or construct this geography. These systems fuse together the pragmatics of gameplay with certain governing ideologies that shape user experience of space and place in the context of each game. In the case of *Ingress*, the corporate, legal, and pragmatic elements that are encoded into the game's basic design are cloaked by a larger narrative which proposes the game as access to a very specific kind of spatialized experience: the experience of cultural heritage. By contrast, the *Geocaching* app, less rigidly but still importantly structured by ideology, presents a user experience less defined by narrative, and therefore somewhat more open to the imposition of vernacular values and knowledge on to in-game geography. The argument presented in this essay, while instantiated in the analysis of these two platforms, is not married to any single device, platform, or software version, however. These two apps have been chosen for analysis only because they represent two popular but somewhat different systems for shaping user experience with space and place, or with the concept of cultural heritage. In exposing these differences, I am not intending to criticize or praise either platform; I simply wish to show the ways in which different configurations in the hybrid structures of digital technology, invested as they are with the pragmatic, legal, or corporate concerns of technology companies, quietly overlay physical spaces with cultural value systems.

Because locative augmented reality games like *Ingress*, games that employ GPS technology to overlay gameplay onto physical spaces, necessarily require users to move through physical spaces to engage in gameplay, they must make use of what Marc Tuters and Kazys Varnelis have called the "annotative" function of locative media (Tuters and Varnelis 2006). In other words, they tag digital information to physical spaces that can be accessed by users at later times, in this case, generally as they come into proximity to the physical site. As a quick illustration that will be fleshed out later, the information annotated to physical sites in *Ingress* is generally minimal;

along with game-related information about the control and modification of the portal by other players, the user will generally find at least one picture of the portal site and a short description of it. Yet, aside from the value players locate in the gameplay itself, it has been widely noted in the press that players value the game's requirement to visit physical sites. This value stems not from the digital annotations they find there, but rather because they are forced to experience physical spaces and to interact with others in order to play. For instance, *LifeHacker* writer Alan Henry noted in a June 2015 piece on his experience with *Ingress*:

> I've met people for whom Ingress is their primary source of interaction with others. I've met people who are disabled and use the game to find a community they can get involved with, and people who are socially anxious and prefer to talk through text long before meeting people in person. I've met people who have lost weight thanks to all of the walking they do while playing Ingress. I've met people who used to never get out of the house (much like me) until they started playing. When I say it takes all kinds, I mean it, and I've found a welcoming, extremely diverse community that I don't feel strange or alone being a part of. If you stick with it, I'll bet you will too (Henry 2015).

These functions, especially the emphasis on the actualized experience of physical spaces, are not incidental. They are intentional features of the game, as it was originally envisioned by Niantic's designers. The head of Niantic, John Hanke has explained, for example, that in building the application, "[w]e wanted to experiment with this idea that you could use technology and mobile apps to get people more deeply in touch with the real world instead of the opposite—instead of people tuning out the real world and focusing only on their technology" (Sydell 2014). Indeed, this kind of conscious opening up to the physical spaces around a person is hinted at in the game's tag line: "The world around you is not what it seems."

Yet as the tagline also suggests, the game's aesthetic features don't simply aim to promote getting users off their computers and out-of-doors but also to actively shape their experiences in the spaces they traverse. "Ingress offers you a totally new experience of your city," writes Louise Beltung, "where you traverse your city for hours on end with smartphone users who were complete strangers only moments ago, making public space into your playing field—climbing the Ingress hierarchy, level by level" (Beltzung 2015). This "totally new experience" of the city (or town or county, for there is suburban and rural play of *Ingress* as well), of course, isn't all that new in technological terms. Indeed locative media scholar Adrianna de Souza e Silva wrote of these technologies in 2004 that they had become "tools for creating novel and unpredictable imaginary spaces, re-narrating cities" (de Souza e Silva 2004a, 1). More recently in 2013, I made a case for closer folkloristic attention to the ways in which the process described by de Souza e Silva interacts with our previous understanding of folk geographies, culturally constructed maps or landscapes with resonance in specific folk groups. I also suggested that the boundaries of relevant cultural categories, such as locality, or folk groups, such as residents of a specific neighborhood, may be changing significantly as a result of the changing conditions of access to both folk geographic

knowledge and local social interaction (Buccitelli 2013).[7] What follows is a reversal of focus from this previous work. Instead of centering on the creation, creative expansion, or alteration of folk geographies through the integration and use of locative media in vernacular life, this essay exposes the strategic structures encountered.

The Shapers of a Heritage Geography

In the case of *Ingress*, the most operative knowledges in the game are not necessarily those of the "local" or the "vernacular" but of something very like what folklorists and ethnologist might call "heritage." [8] Robert Shannan Peckham has outlined a useful distinction within this concept. Peckham observes that:

> For most people today 'heritage' carries two related sets of meanings. On the one hand, it is associated with tourism and with sites of historical interest that have been preserved for the nation. Heritage designates those institutions involved in the celebration, management and maintenance of material objects, landscapes, monuments and buildings that reflect the nation's past. On the other hand, it is used to describe a set of shared values and collective memories; it betokens inherited customs and a sense of accumulated communal experiences that are construed as a 'birthright' and are expressed in distinct languages and through other cultural performances (Peckham 2003, 1).

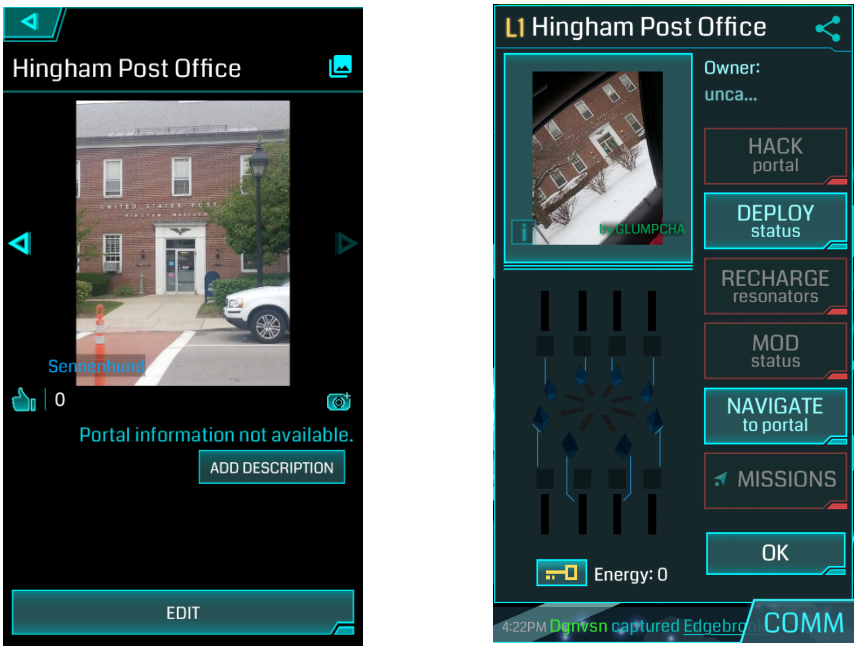
Peckham's distinction sits at the heart of the tension in how games like *Ingress* construct heritage geographies. Portals, you will recall, are not simply local landmarks or sites of import to specific communities, but rather are "clustered around key sites, places of cultural, intellectual, and religious significance around the world." In other words, they are sites of human heritage, though more like those described in Peckham's first definition than his second. For, as Robbie Campbell's statement shows, these different senses of heritage knowledge can be mutually exclusive. Campbell, born in Beaumont and living there, is unaware that all this time a heritage site has been sitting right under his nose. Without *Ingress*, he implies, he may never have known about Beaumont's connection to Edison; it is simply not part of his personal or social "conceptual map" (Tangherlini 1999; 2001; Buccitelli 2013).[9] And here we find the crux of *Ingress*'s proposed user experience exposed. By guiding users to specific sites that are understood through the aesthetic construct of the game to be sites of human cultural importance, *Ingress* requires its users to engage in the sensory experience of what it proposes to be their own heritage. As Deborah Kapchan, following Kathleen Stewart and Laurajane Smith, has pointed out:

> ..."[P]ower is a thing of the senses" (Stewart 2007:84). The performance of heritage, the actual embodiment of heritage – in festivals, dances, historic recreations, interactive museum exhibits, storytelling, music listening and production – thus takes on political force. For insofar as performances inculcate identity through mimesis and repetition, evoking and creating memories henceforth associated with heritage, the heritage event creates the very body of the "inheritee," transforming the social sensorium in

> the process...heritage events are 'not only physical experiences of 'doing,' but also emotional experiences of 'being'' (L. Smith 2006: 71). (Kapchan 2014, 18-19).

In other words, by laying out *Ingress* as a geography of human heritage, Niantic Labs is constructing a certain politics of heritage for its users as well, shaping their understandings of what is and is not part of this heritage and asking them to embody this knowledge through performance, that is, by visiting and interacting with these physical sites.

Yet, notably, I have encountered nothing to suggest that Niantic (or Google) is particularly interested in adjudicating in matters of heritage *per se*. It is perhaps for this reason, and the more generalized user-experience design logic of "crowdsourcing", that *Ingress* portals, at least after the platform's initial launch, have often been user defined.



Figures 3 and 4. *Ingress* interface showing the information available about a portal. The post office image featured in figure 3 is clearly taken from the window of a vehicle. The image in figure 4 was taken from the sidewalk across the street.

Niantic developed a procedure for players to submit new portals that could be added to the digital geography of the game as sites that emit XM and which can be controlled by factional players. At the same time, the construction of this procedure reveals some of the ways in which Niantic seeks to establish a *de facto* heritage geography for its users. Interestingly, as well, these guidelines have shifted over time, and without much, if any, publicity by Niantic/Google. Here is a synthesized version of these criteria as they appeared on the *Ingress* website in the spring of 2015 and later in June 2015:

Well since you asked, we've developed these criteria to help you understand what we consider to be a great Portal and to give more insight into how we evaluate new candidates. Please keep in mind that the following criteria apply to new Portal candidates, but are not necessarily retroactively applied to existing Portals.

ACCEPTANCE CRITERIA

High-quality Portal candidates are those that help Agents discover and enjoy their community, such as:

- **A LOCATION WITH A COOL STORY, A PLACE IN HISTORY OR EDUCATIONAL VALUE**
  - Interesting story behind the location/object
  - Historical significance (apart from just being old)
  - Historical sites and markers
- **A COOL PIECE OF ART OR UNIQUE ARCHITECTURE**
  - Statues, paintings, mosaics, light installations, etc.
  - Venues that showcase fine art (e.g., performance art theaters and museums)
  - Buildings designed by renowned architects/ structures famous specifically for their architecture
- **A HIDDEN GEM OR HYPER-LOCAL SPOT**
  - A popular local spot that you would take a friend visiting your community for the first time
  - A popular spot where locals gather, but may be lesser-known outside the community
  - Tourist spots that showcase local flavor and culture and that make your city/neighborhood unique
  - More off-the-beaten-path tourist attractions (i.e., if you weren't a local, you wouldn't necessarily know to go here)
  - Adventurous tourist attractions - think lookout towers, observatories, signs or markers atop mountain peaks, etc.
- **A COMMUNITY GATHERING PLACE**
  - Somewhere where members of the city/town gather to socialize or impact the community
  - A local hangout where people gather, talk spend time together.
- **A POINT OF INTEREST THAT FACILITATES DISCOVERY/EXERCISE**
  - Promotes the idea of "Adventures on foot"
  - Encourages outdoor exploration

SPECIAL NOD CANDIDATES

Why are many transit stations and post offices Portals if they don't seem to meet the acceptance criteria?

In addition to using the above acceptance criteria, we often add candidates that are a special nod to industries and networks that connect people around the world, just as Ingress connects Agents around the world. These include:

- **PUBLIC LIBRARIES**
  - A nod to education and discovery, cornerstones of Niantic & Ingress
  - Includes little free libraries, provided they are not on private residential property; does not include mobile libraries
- **STAND-ALONE POST OFFICES**
  - A nod to the postal industry as a powerful system that connects the entire world
  - Does not include contract post offices
- **TRANSIT STATIONS**
  - A nod to the transportation industry, which also connects and unites people around the world
  - Includes larger transit hubs, but not necessarily every stop along a transit route.
- **PUBLIC PLACES OF WORSHIP**
  - A nod to the other worldly, which is integral to the story of Ingress

Taking a clear, bright photo for your submission that shows the subject and its surroundings helps us more easily determine if the candidate meets our acceptance criteria and confirm it is physically located in the suggested location.

However, *candidates do not necessarily have to be visually impressive to meet our acceptance criteria*.

Similarly, while descriptions are not required, they are highly encouraged, and they often provide context and help us more clearly understand how your candidate meets the acceptance criteria.

MOST LIKELY REJECTED

This is a non-exhaustive list of Portal candidates that, in general, are rejected, but for which we make some very specific exceptions. Candidates listed here may be rejected even if they meet the acceptance criteria listed above.

We generally reject candidates on the grounds of:

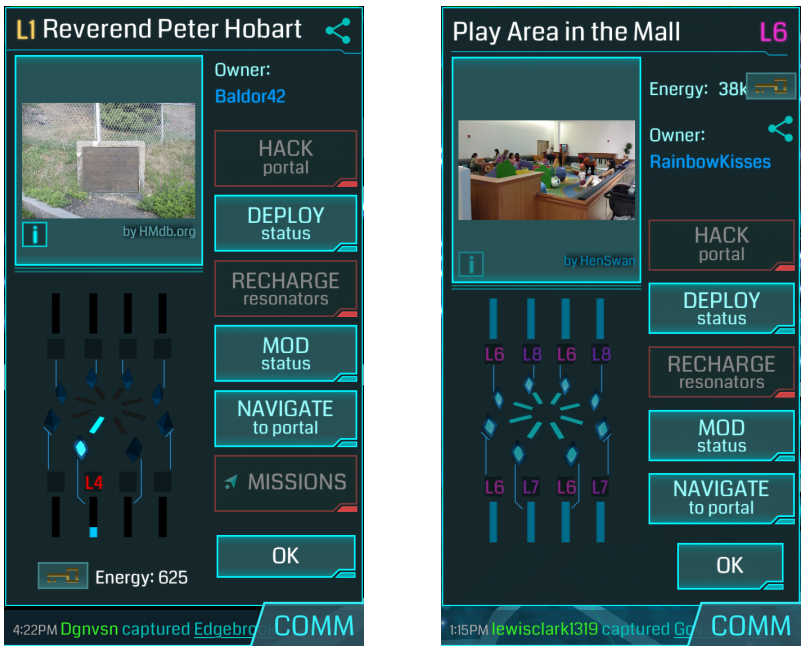
- **PRIMARY/SECONDARY SCHOOLS**
  - Exceptions for art that is accessible from a public sidewalk
- **FIRE STATIONS, POLICE STATIONS AND HOSPITALS**
  - Exceptions for candidates that meet the acceptance criteria and don't interfere with operations of the facility.
- **PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY** (including farms)

PLEASE DON'T SUBMIT

Please refrain from submitting these candidates, as reviewing these submissions slows down the process for everyone.

- Candidates in locations with NO SAFE PEDESTRIAN ACCESS.
- Candidates of PEOPLE, BODY PARTS, LIVE ANIMALS, etc.; please, just don't.
- Candidates that are NATURAL FEATURES (Includes pictures of landscapes as well as submissions where the subject is a lake, river, stream, mountain, volcano, waterfall, etc.; does not include man-made points of interest - plaques, signs, etc. - near natural features).
- Candidates that are NOT PERMANENT, including SEASONAL DISPLAYS that are only put up during certain times of the year.
- Candidates submitted with a PHOTO THAT YOU DID NOT TAKE YOURSELF (i.e., pulled from a third-party source); these will be rejected even if the candidate itself meets acceptance criteria or is on the list of things we generally accept.
- Candidates on PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY (including farms)
- Candidates that may interfere with the operations of FIRE STATIONS, POLICE STATIONS AND HOSPITALS
- Candidates on the grounds of PRIMARY/SECONDARY SCHOOLS[10]

While some of the changes to these guidelines that took place in the period of this study, such as the shuffling around of paragraphs here or there, or the merging of "most likely rejected" and the "please don't submit" categories, are not especially telling, others more clearly demonstrate Niantic's careful concern for the placement of portals. For instance, Niantic deleted of several large categories of sites (Post offices, transit stations, community gathering places, points of interest/discovery) and the removed of the criterion that portal candidates fall into two or more categories. Both of these alterations represent fairly substantial changes to what can be considered, in playable terms "places of cultural, intellectual, and religious significance."



Figures 5. shows a portal listing for a plaque commemorating the landing of the Rev. Peter Hobart and the founding settlers of Hingham, MA in 1635. The plaque was placed on this location by the Daughters of the American Revolution in 1913. Figure 6 shows the portal listing for a children's play structure at a shopping mall.

Moreover, even in the guidelines that remained consistent, there were some interesting elaborations on how Niantic constructs its geography of human heritage. For instance, we might note that "natural features" are excluded from the criteria for portal creation, unless, of course, they have been marked in some way by a plaque or sign, a criterion that suggests that while a wide variety of other human made structures might count in this geography, natural features only do so insofar as they have been assimilated by tourism or heritage industries or governmental entities, of the kind that might be responsible for placing a marker or plaque at the site. In fact, as Niantic quietly notes elsewhere in its criteria, many of its original portals were identified not by players or designers but by the Historical Markers Database, a site that tracks and maps recognized historic landmarks.

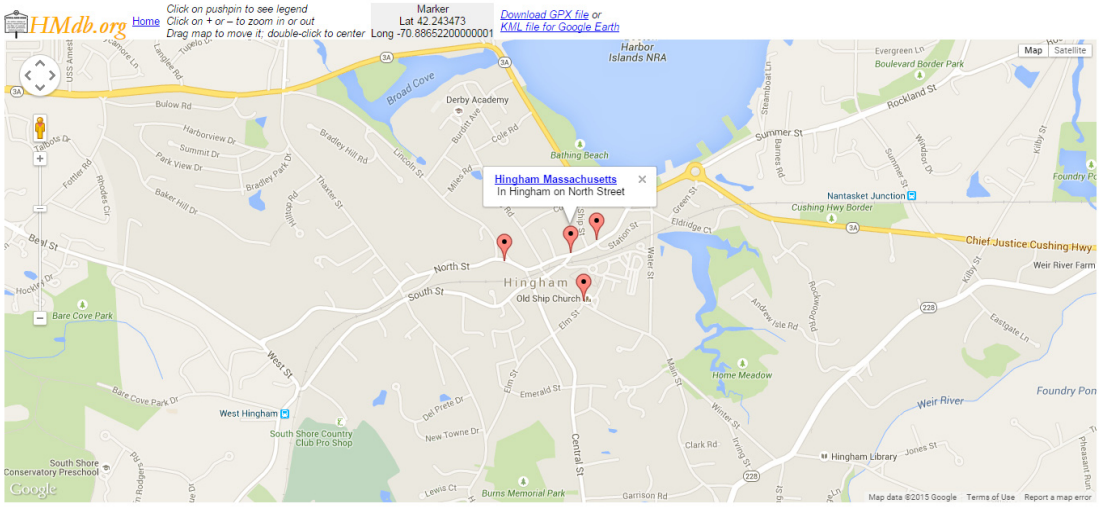


Figure 7. shows the map interface of the Historical Markers Database for Hingham, MA.

Similarly, as folklorists should be especially cognizant of, the prohibition on impermanent "displays" also excludes what we might call intangible culture, unless perhaps such heritage practices have generated a permanent physical site, such as a fairground, workshop, or theater, again structures of the kind that might be generated by the institutionalization of cultural practices into "intangible cultural heritage" (ICH). We should note as well that this rule also excludes even tangible culture that has a temporary duration or presence in a particular area.

Meanwhile, along with the negative encoding of values through prohibition, we also find articulations of several positive values, though some of these were eliminated during the changes instituted by June 2015. For instance, portals are encouraged at sites that promote "outdoor exploration" or "adventures on foot, or at "tourist spots that showcase local flavor and culture and that make your city/neighborhood unique," or, tellingly, at "off-the-beaten-path tourist attractions (i.e., if you weren't a local, you wouldn't necessarily know to go here)." All of these, of course, are the exact values we find celebrated in Niantic's marketing and commented on by users and media reports surrounding the game. More to the point, they are, as is suggested in the criterion for libraries, "a nod to education and discovery, cornerstones of Niantic & Ingress." Despite its strategy of developing a platform to allow the user defined creation of its heritage geography, then, Niantic makes clear in these guidelines the extent to which the values of Niantic/Google are, in fact, the baseline in this spatial regime.[11]

We should not overlook, of course, the fact that many of the principles that govern the selection of portals also have pragmatic values or reasons behind them. An impermanent portal is problematic in practical terms for playability. A large number of players physically congregating at a police station could interfere with its functioning, a potential problem that raises issues not only of practicality but of legality. Indeed, several of the guidelines for portals, especially the prohibitions, seem to address these

issues explicitly. Portals with "no safe pedestrian access" are excluded to prevent player injury and potential liability; third-party photos are prohibited to prevent copyright lawsuits; private residential properties are prohibited to avoid issues of trespass. The prohibitions are not unreasonable, of course, both from the standpoint of helping players to avoid injury or legal entanglements, and from the standpoint of helping Niantic avoid the same, yet they undeniably but very quietly shape the geography of the game, and in turn the experience of heritage it proposes.

The Old and Ordinary: A Case Study in the Experience of Cultural Heritage

And now it's time to reveal my double identity. I am an agent of the Enlighted. Playing sporadically but regularly as @CarloTresca since 2014, I have hacked portals, created links and fields, and engaged in various missions, sometimes working with a local Enlightened faction in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, but also solo in half a dozen US states and several European countries.

I mention my player connection here not only to show my familiarity with the playable side of the game but also because it bears on part of the research I conducted for this study. In order to understand the way in which the *Ingress* platform encodes heritage geographies and structures the user experience of heritage in practice, rather than just through the published guidelines of the game, I decided to make a systematic study of the portal geography players would encounter in a given area. In order to make this study manageable, I choose a small and well-defined area of about half a mile square. I also choose a location that I was deeply personally familiar with, but on which I had done no previous research: the town square of my hometown of Hingham, Massachusetts. Having first moved to Hingham in 1985 as a child, I became familiar with the formal history of Hingham (founded in 1635) like any informed and interested resident might, through a long and somewhat piecemeal learning process, consisting of local history units in school classes and visits to various historical sites around town. At the same time, having lived in the town for many years, though not regularly since 2000, I also have my own conceptual map of the space, a map developed both through my individual experiences in town and those I shared or observed with others.

On several trips to Hingham between the fall of 2014 and the spring of 2015, I mapped out *Ingress* portals in the area of Hingham Square, an area which is both personally familiar to me, which is a significant center of social and cultural life in the community, and which is rich with sites with connections to local, state, and US national history. The Square area is the location of more than a dozen Ingress portals. Some of these portals include institutionally recognized sites of national historical significance, such as the Old Ship Church (built in 1681), a Unitarian church which is also the oldest religious building in continuous use in the United States, or state-level significance, such as the house of Samuel Lincoln (1622-1690), an early settler of Hingham whose descendants include a Governor of Massachusetts and President Abraham Lincoln. Some portal sites of this kind were represented only by historical markers, rather than existing structures, such as the Peter Hobart plaque in Figure

5 above. Other portals included important formally defined social sites, such as the Hingham Community Center, an organization that does public programming and offers rental of event space in its building in Hingham Square. Consistent with the submission guidelines, the Hingham Post Office (Figures 3 and 4) was also included as a portal. By contrast, while two other churches in the square were sites of portals, no portal was located at the St. Paul Catholic Church (founded in 1871), which is the central church in an area with a large Catholic population. Instead, a small fountain (the "Pineapple Fountain" shown in Figure 1) tucked away in the courtyard between the church and rectory was included.

As suggested by the guidelines above, less formally (and physically) defined social and cultural spaces were more systematically unrepresented. For example, a street corner located in the central part of the square, which has often served as a meeting point for members of the community, especially teenagers, was not the site of a portal. The tendency not to represent social and cultural sites without a definite marker such as a statue or plaque may seem to be a minor aspect in terms of the representation of the community's heritage in the context of Hingham, but in urban areas in which the vernacular conceptual maps developed by communities are often centered on widely understood but uncodified geographies, this matter takes on additional significance. For instance, studies going back at least to the 1940s have indicated, the social systems, especially youth social systems, in many Boston area neighborhoods have significantly revolved around street corner spaces.[12]

In order to better understand the portal creation process, I also submitted both a portal candidate and a picture for an existing portal. For the former, I choose the Old Ordinary (built in 1688) a Colonial-era inn, now run as a small museum by the Hingham Historical Society. I choose this building because, unlike the street corner, it was a well-defined site with a demonstrable historical connection reaching back as far or farther as a majority of the existing portals. Moreover, the Ordinary, as a teaching museum run by the local historical society included on a popular historic houses tour, is a principal site in the officially sanctioned heritage geography of the town.

After submitting the portal location and a brief description, received a terse response: "Thank you for your Portal submission. However, this Portal candidate does not meet the criteria required for approval. Please refer to New Portal Submission criteria at our Help Center for further information." It is tempting to speculate that portal rejection might be done in a blanket fashion, but both my photo of the main Hingham Historical Society building, and a portal submitted at a location in Pennsylvania have been accepted into the geography of the game. Since no official explanation was given, it is obviously not possible to understand exactly why the portal was not accepted, and there could be any number of real or perceived reasons for its rejection. However, as with the other Hingham Square examples mentioned above, the important point is that the inclusion and exclusion of portal sites, and hence the embodied experience of heritage *Ingress* proposes, is certainly not coterminous vernacular folk geographies, such as those which might include street corners as sociocultural places, but also may not even be coterminous with localized institutional heritage geographies, such as

local churches or heritage management institutions, either. Instead, *Ingress*'s heritage geography, despite its claims to stand for universal human heritage, is a unique and often opaquely crafted geography, a spatial regime structured around the corporate values of Google/Niantic.

Playing Space and Place: *Ingress* Monuments and Geocaches

While player experience of space and place is clearly shaped in significant ways by the underlying conditions of play set forth by Niantic designers and Google, it's important to also acknowledge that players don't always go down the paths carefully set for them. Just as de Certeau long ago observed the possibility of for a vernacular re-appropriation of urban spaces based on the individual's tactics of walking in the city, *Ingress* players, encountering a heavily determined geography shaped both by Google specifically and by institutional forces of law and commerce more generally, engage in many similar practices of tactical poaching, sometimes with the sanction of Google itself. Most often, players have employed tactics common to many digital environments of repurposing in-game features to create unintended aesthetic or meaning-making possibilities. For instance, a reporter for *Wired Magazine* noted in a 2014 article that:

> The friendly localized rivalries have even led to some unexpected and unprompted instances of geo-locative artwork. Given a palette of geo-locative points on a map, Enlightened and Resistance field agents teamed up to engage in not-so-random acts of field art, carving out virtual bat signals, woodpeckers, and sailboats to decorate the game's interface (Andersen 2014).[13]

In addition to simple aesthetic creations such as this, players have also occasionally used in-game practices to comment on actual world events. In the wake of the Boston marathon bombing, for example, leaders from the two factions at MIT declared a truce, and, player and Google employee Christopher Davis led an effort to place two ingress portals, one of each faction color, on the site of the death of Officer Sean Collier, who was shot by the bombers on MIT campus (Kirsner 2013).

Yet, despite these possibilities for developing a tactics of resistance in *Ingress*, its vernacular spaces are significantly more limited than other locative media or augmented reality games, mainly due to the tight conditions of control set up by Niantic. In this regard, a brief comparison of these features of another platform, the app *Geocaching*, and the broader practices associated with geocaching, provides an informative contrast.

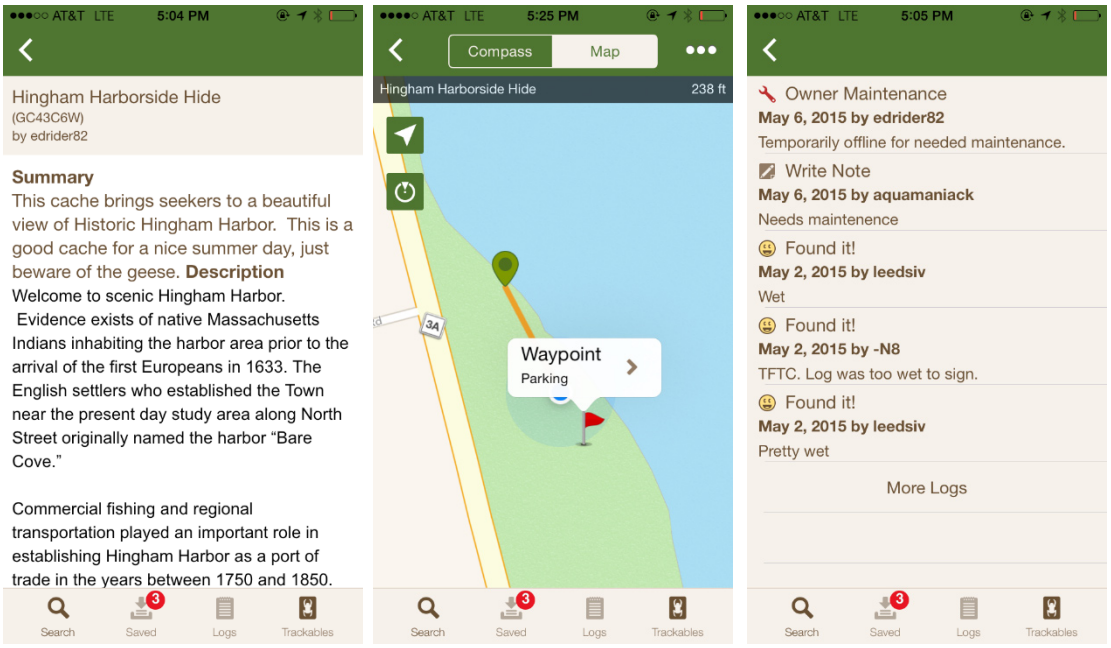
The practice of geocaching developed around the year 2000, when Global Positioning Systems data became widely available through handheld GPS devices (McNeill 2007, 292). Similar to much older practices like "letterboxing," geocaching involves the placement of hidden "caches," or water-proof containers generally ranging in size from a lipstick tube to a small tool box, in the local landscape. Once the cache is placed, its GPS coordinates and other information about the cache is made available to players so that they may later locate the cache themselves. When this is done, the finding player generally records her/his name or nick name in a log book in

Figures 8 and 9. Showing two *Geocahing* caches of different sizes near Lancaster, PA. Photos by author.

the cache, and sometimes leaves a small object (a penny, a plastic figure, a computer circuit board) in the cache to mark the find.

Although the technological platforms for geocaching have varied a bit, the most common current point of access to information about the location of geocaches is through smartphone applications like *Geocaching*, which has both a freeware and paid version. These versions are quite similar, though the paid version provides the player with slightly more detailed information about caches in the local area. In addition to the logbook found in the cache itself, both the free and paid applications allow users to record their find of the cache (or their failure to find it), along with some notes and pictures for players or the cache owner.

Like *Ingress* then, geocaching is a locative media "game" that requires players to move through physical spaces in order to locate pre-defined sites, to interact with these sites in certain defined ways, and to interact with other players as they do so. Both are, in their own ways, examples of what Lynne McNeill has referred to as "type B serial collaborative creations," or activities that require players to move through space to locate certain objects or sites, but in a serialized rather than simultaneous fashion (McNeill 2007, 285-286). In other words, in both activities, users are in some ways "alone together," to borrow Sherry Turkle's term (Turkle 2012). They interact with each other digitally, sometimes simultaneously but many times in the serialized communication common to many digital environments (Buccitelli 2012, 78-79); they visit the same locations, but often individually.



Figures 10, 11, and 12**.** Showing various interface elements for a single cache in the *Geocaching* app.

Unlike *Ingress*, however, geocaching is less of a "game," at least in the terms that have come to define many digitally enabled games. There are no real objectives other than finding or placing caches, and there is no significant reward for success or failure to do so. Also, and most significantly, there is no master narrative. Geocaching, unlike *Ingress*, is not "about" anything, and thus the sites of caches don't carry the same overarching narrative baggage that *Ingress* portals do.

Also, notably, geocache sites, unlike *Ingress* portals are entirely user created: there are no caches to my knowledge that have been placed on the map by *Geocaching* employees.[14] Yet, like *Ingress*, the *Geocaching* application does have a specific set of guidelines as to the placement of caches. These guidelines are, if anything, much more extensive than those of *Ingress*, but here is a bullet list of the main governing principles (See p. 22).

While we find some pragmatic overlaps in these guidelines with those that govern *Ingress*, such as the compliance with local laws or a concern for placement of caches on private property (though *Geocaching*'s guidelines are notably more lenient on the latter), there is nothing in these guidelines that speaks to the placement of caches in cultural terms. There is no concern for aesthetic importance of the site, for "local flavor," for historical significance, or for any of the other heritage-related constructs that are so thoroughly integrated into both the master narrative and the portal submission guidelines of *Ingress*.

I. PLACEMENT Guidelines: Placement guidelines govern the physical location of a geocache.

"When you go to hide a geocache, think of the reason you are bringing people to that spot. If the only reason is for the geocache, then find a better spot." – briansnat

The more geocaches that you have found, the better you will understand the various elements that make up a great geocaching experience. This knowledge will be invaluable when you place a hide, and likely make your geocache more enjoyable for the community. We encourage you to find at least twenty geocaches before you choose to hide one.

1. Fundamental Placement Guidelines
    1. All local laws and documented land management policies apply.
    2. You assure us that you have the landowner's and/or land manager's permission before you hide any geocache, whether placed on private or public property.
    3. Geocaches are never buried, neither partially nor completely.
    4. Geocache placements do not damage, deface or destroy public or private property.
    5. Wildlife and the natural environment are not harmed in the pursuit of geocaching.
    6. Geocaches are not placed in restricted, prohibited or otherwise inappropriate locations.
    7. Physical elements of different geocaches should be at least 0.10 miles (528 ft or 161 m) apart.
    8. Geocaches are allowed in space, on other planets and in spacecraft.
2. Other Placement Considerations
    1. Select an appropriate location and container.
    2. Label your geocache.

II. LISTING Guidelines: Listing guidelines cover the requirements that you, as a geocache owner, need to adhere to in order for your geocache to be successfully published on Geocaching.com.

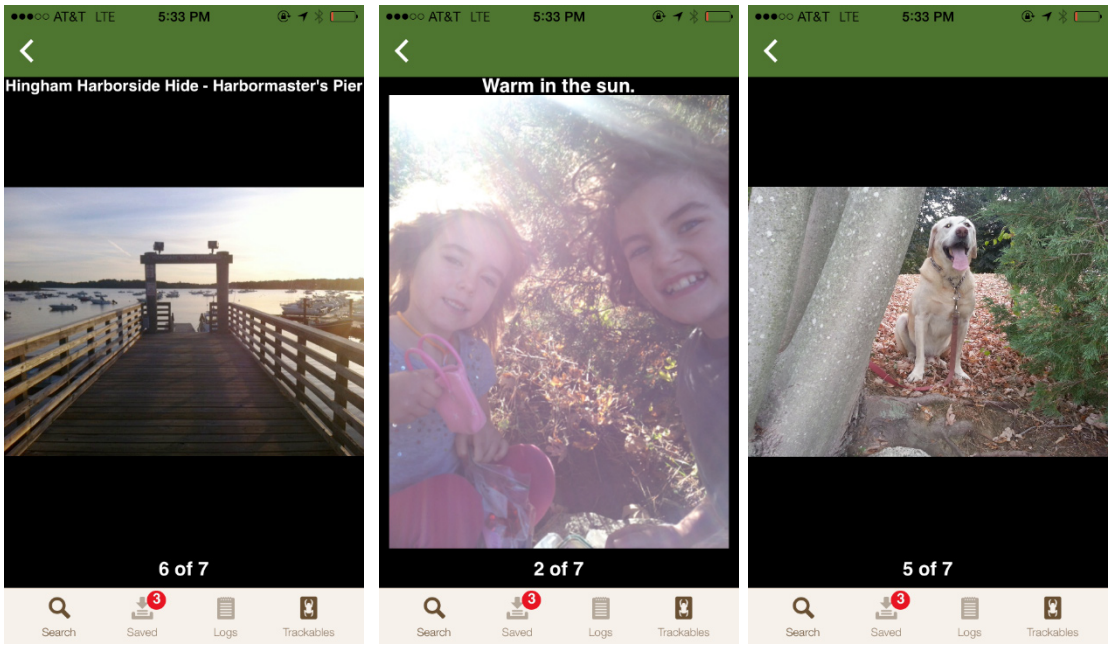
Before a geocache is published on the website, a volunteer reviewer will look at the page for compliance with these guidelines. The physical geocache site is not verified. As the geocache owner, you retain all responsibility for your geocache listings and you are responsible for the placement and care of your geocache.

1. Listing Guidelines for All Geocaches
    1. Technical Requirements
        - Listings must contain accurate GPS coordinates.
        - Geocache listings that require additional website registration, installs or downloads are generally not publishable.
    2. Geocache Maintenance
        - Owner is responsible for geocache listing maintenance.
        - Owner is responsible for visits to the physical location.
    3. Geocache Contents
        - Geocache containers include a logsheet or logbook.
        - Contents are family-friendly.
        - Contents are appropriate for outdoor life.
    4. Solicitation and Commercial Content
        - Geocaches do not solicit for any purpose.
        - Commercial geocaches are disallowed.
    5. Geocache Permanence
        - Geocaches are placed for the long term.
    6. Submitting a Geocache Listing
        - Placing a large number of geocaches to be published on the same date requires advanced planning.
        - Geocache must be in place before you enable the listing.
        - Communicate with your reviewer.[15]

The two platforms are further differentiated by their respective interfaces. While the *Ingress* platform requires players to submit a picture of the portal site, and offers the chance to submit a short description, the picture guidelines are fairly strict and few descriptions are entered for portals. Also, while there is an in-world chat function that allows a player to IM with any other player in the general area, there is no space attached to specific portals that players can use to create annotations on the site for other players.

By contrast, the interface of *Geocaching* allows but does not require cache owners and players to upload pictures, and is much less restrictive about the types of pictures accepted. For example, at a visit to a cache on a beach in Hingham, MA, yielded several uploaded photos, some of which were not particularly relevant to finding the cache.[16]

Similarly, the cache owner is allowed to upload a much longer description of the cache, and owners use this space in a wide variety of ways, which include discussing local history associated with the placement of the cache, recalling their personal memories associated with this site, giving information or clues to help locate the



Figures 13, 14, and 15**.** showing user images uploaded to the "Hingham Harborside Hide" cache. The actual location of the cache is in a rock seawall along the beach. The first image shows a dock that is several minutes' walk from the cache site, not a waypoint. The second image shows two unidentified children with the caption "Warm in the sun." The third image shows a dog standing nearby to the cache location.

Figures 16, 17, and 18. showing a Saint Patrick's Day themed cache and a "techno cache" themed cache. Both placed near Lancaster, PA. Photos by author.

cache, or otherwise providing information they see as relevant to the cache's location.[17] Interestingly, cache creators will sometimes place caches in a "series," a number of different cache sites that are intended to be found in a particular order. In many cases, these series caches have themes or narratives associated with them, some of which can only be understood if the user has found all the caches in the proper order. But even single caches sometimes have themes associated with them, which can include holiday themes, such as Saint Patrick's Day or Christmas or themes associated with the contents of the original cache, such as "techno cache." Interestingly, however, one of the few content related prohibitions in the *Geocaching* guidelines is one that prevents the use of caches for commercial promotion: you can't create a cache near a McDonald's that is titled "Buy a Big Mac."

Finally, unlike the *Ingress* platform, *Geocaching* provides several ways for finders to leave their own annotations on the site. They can "log" their find on the application, they can leave notes and comments for future finders, and they can upload their own pictures. Most commonly, these spaces are used by finders to record their experience on the find, to thank the cache creator, to note problems associated with finding the cache, or to mention things that they saw around them as they looked for the cache. These are not always permanent landmarks. At one cache I encountered, for instance, several finders had noted the presence of a large white dog in the yard across the street, a comment that turned out to be helpful in finding the cache.

By drawing this comparison between *Ingress* and *Geocaching*, I want to do more than simply expose the differences in player experience or to praise one and admonish the other for their differing levels of openness to vernacular expression in player experience. Actually, I want to highlight what is common about both of these platforms, and in some form about all locative media. As programs that require users to engage in a certain experience of physical space in order to participate, both programs overlay these spaces with cultural values. In the case of *Ingress* these cultural values are heavily managed by Niantic's design and policies, while in *Geocaching* the cultural values tend to be more heavily user-defined. Yet, importantly, in doing so, both offer users an encounter with spatialized knowledge, with a heritage or a folk geography of sorts. While Niantic's spatial regime seems to connect more readily with the kind of universalized concept of heritage noted in Peckham's first definition, *Geocaching* seems to allow users to define the in-game geography through the "accumulated communal experiences" that constitute heritage's alternative definition. Yet while the guidelines in *Ingress* seem to more clearly and heavily define the geography laid out in the game, we should be aware that the guidelines and technical parameters and affordances of both programs play a key though often hidden role in structuring the spatial experiences and knowledge of users.

As folklorists or ethnologists concerned with understanding the workings of power in the production and reception of vernacular, traditional, or everyday expressions or knowledge, we must begin to more deeply explore the ways in which digital technologies, and the corporate and legal structures that underlie their creation, have importantly begun to structure or restructure central aspects of our everyday experience. In particular, as I have shown here, we must be cognizant not only of the ways in which institutions of power *act* through digital technologies to control the vernacular, but also the ways in which the ideologies of various institutional structures are directly encoded in these digital platforms themselves. Inasmuch as everyday life, including embodied experiences, such as the experience of cultural heritage, is increasingly shot through with the use of digital technology, the encoding of institutional power in this way will become an ever more central point of study for scholars of vernacular culture.

Notes

1 My thanks go Robert Glenn Howard and Coppélie Cocq for their great helpfulness and expert advice as I prepared this article. I would also like to offer thanks to the other participants in the "Inheritance of the Digital" panel at the 2015 Congress of the Société Internationale d´Ethnologie et de Folklore in Zagreb: Stefan Gelfgren, Christian Ritter, Anna Johansson, Nancy McEntire, Andrew Peck, and Asta Vonderau. This wonderful discussion contributed greatly to this piece.

2 The word insertion here is my own. The original article in *Wired* appears to contain a syntactical error.

3 The research for this study was carried out between 2014 and mid-2015. Since that time, Niantic Labs, the original Google subdivision, broke off to become an independent

company, and several game features have changed. One of the most notable changes to the game is that user portal submission has been suspended. But the case made here is for increased attention to the construction of heritage regimes through locative gaming, and is not contingent upon the particulars of any specific regime constructed by a platform or version. So while a revised analysis of *Ingress* in its current configuration would likely look slightly different than what is presented here, the fundamental point remains unchanged.

4 For suggestive considerations of different aspects of this issue, see Blank 2013; Buccitelli 2013.

5 Interestingly, Niantic's second and much better known release, *Pokémon GO* (2016), while it uses much of the same underlying data, sets up a much less explicit geographic regime. This is partially because the *Pokémon GO* platform is based more heavily on the appearance of seemingly random visual augmentations in physical spaces, the various Pokémon that the player encounters, rather than the more static, map and site-based *Ingress*.

6 The classic distinction between the concepts of "space" and "place" were offered by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan. Tuan's works *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception* (1974) and *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977), have formed the basis for what Tim Cresswell calls the phenomenological approach to place. Although this school of thinking has come to envelop a number of disparate positions, all of them seek "to define the essence of human existence as one that is necessarily and importantly 'in-place'."(Cresswell 2004, 51). In *Space and Place*, for instance, Tuan separates the concept of space from the concept of place using "experience" as a wedge. Treating "space" as the bare facts of spatial existence, Tuan writes that "[t]he given cannot be known in itself. What can be known is a reality that is a construct of experience, a creation of feeling and thought" (Tuan 1977, 9 quoted in Cresswell 2008, 55). Through our experiences in particular locations, Tuan argues, we develop meaningful understandings of and attachments to space. In this way, the basic facts of "space" become the humanized and culturally meaningful category of "place." While I find this distinction useful in many contexts, I am not especially concerned here to establish place-making processes or to show how users distinguish between places and spaces.

7 See also de Souza e Silva 2004a; 2004b; Gordon and de Souza e Silva 2011; de Souza e Silva and Sheller 2015. In a slightly different but very suggestive take, Shira Chess has argued that *Ingress* represents a form of transmedia storytelling that brings together local and global registers in transformative ways (Chess 2014).

8 For excellent discussions of how folklorists and ethnologists have conceived of this term, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Bendix 2000; 2009; Hafstein 2007.

9 The term "conceptual map" as applied by Tangherlini and myself, essentially to mean a sociocultural form of spatialized knowledge attached to specific sites, should not be confused with the de Certeaudean "concept city," by which he intended to indicate the way in which urban geography is laid out strategically according to an abstract set of concepts and then instrumentalized by institutions of power. This he would distinguish from the lived tactical knowledge of daily life.

10 I have presented here a composite of two versions of the portal criteria recorded from the *Ingress* help forums on the http://www.ingress.com site between March and June 2015. It would be very interesting, in a longer study, to track how guidelines like these are altered over time, and in doing so to analyze how these changes reveal the evolving concerns within the corporate cultures that produce them. But for purposes of clarity and concision here, I have omitted notations showing the changes that took place within the period of this study. The relevant point is to expose the existence of tacit value-regimes within the

structures of these platforms, rather than to historicize them within the history of platform development or corporate culture. Currently portal submissions have been suspended by Niantic Labs. The new portal submission FAQ currently reads: "As of September 2, 2015, we suspended new Portal submissions for a period of time while we work on processing the backlog and on designing new and more efficient ways to evaluate Portal submissions and edits" (https://support.ingress.com/hc/en-us/articles/217695688-How-do-I-add-a-Portal-or-get-a-Portal-removed, accessed March 30, 2016).

11 This is, of course, not the only tacit feature of the *Ingress* platform. Hulsey and Reeves, for instance, have also argued that *Ingress* is "simply suggestive of broader sociocultural transformations in which citizens must submit to pervasive surveillance in order to participate fully in contemporary economic and political life" (2014, 390). Along different lines, Wendy Hui Kyung Chun has offered fascinating insights into the hidden cultural logics of computer code itself, both in her 2011 book *Programmed Visions: Software and* Memory and in her 2015 chapter in de Souza e Silva and Sheller's *Mobilty and Locative Media: Mobile Communication in Hybrid Spaces*. But here, I am responding most closely to scholars of vernacular media spaces such as Robert Glenn Howard (2008a;2008b;2010), who have called for closer attention to the way in which institutions set the conditions in which vernacular knowledge and practices take shape in digital spaces.

12 For perhaps the most well-known articulation of this pattern, see William Foote Whyte's classic 1943 study *Street Corner Society*. See also, Gans 1982 [1962], 14, 64-74 and Buccitelli 2016, 113.

13 Spelling corrected from original source.

14 Interestingly, while another notable difference seems to be that geocaching involves placing a physical object into the environment, there apparently were "virtual geocaches" at some point, but these were deemed too difficult to manage and were mostly eliminated. I have also encountered some geocaches that involve something slightly less physical, such as the placement of a sticker on a light pole with a numerical code that is used to identify that as a cache.

15 These guidelines were recorded from the help form of the *Geocaching* app website, http://www.geocaching.com/about/guidlines.aspx, accessed in June 2015.

16 *Geocaching* does place a warning for players before they view uploaded photos that these could provide unwanted information about the location of the cache.

17 As Freese and Hargittai put it "[t]he collective wisdom of geocachers is more varied, colorful, and intimate than anything you'd find in a guide book" (2010, 67).

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Capturing the Slender Man:
Online and Offline Vernacular Practice in the Digital Age

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Abstract
This article argues that networked digital media technologies enable vernacular practices to become both more mediated and more visible. Using the case of a popular digital legend known as "The Slender Man" to illustrate this argument, this article suggests that this increased visibility circulates awareness and encourages an open-source sense of collaboration. As users collaborate on creating and sharing vernacular practices, they begin to develop hierarchies of performance that privilege certain types of interaction, creating an atmosphere that facilitates vernacular critique. The result is that the digital age creates new possibilities for both the networked circulation of vernacular practice and for the meta-discursive interactions surrounding those practices.

The room went silent as the eyes of a dozen middle schoolers fixed on the front of the room. Side conversations, under-the-table texting, and notebook doodles ceased. The question I had just asked resonated with a grim electricity, garnering me their undivided attention.

On that particular overcast June morning, I found myself the invited guest of a summer journalism program for local middle schoolers. Because of my research in digital communication and everyday life, I had been asked to talk to them about their project on digital privacy. Afterward, I continued chatting with the kids and answering their questions about digital media. After answering several of their questions, I posed one of my own, "What do you know about the Slender Man?" This was the moment the room went silent.

In retrospect, I shouldn't have been surprised by this reaction. Only three weeks prior, two girls in a nearby town had attempted to stab their friend to death. When authorities asked the girls why they had done it, they said it was to win the favor of the Slender Man, an urban legend they had learned about online. News media narratives focused on these surprising events, frequently encouraging parents to more closely monitor their children's digital media use. As a result, this was probably a question they'd gotten from their parents at some point during the last several weeks, and those parents likely asked it in a much more concerned or accusatory tone.

Worried that I had just horrified a group of middle schoolers, I offered them assurance. I promised them I wouldn't judge, that I was just curious. There was a lot of misinformation spreading, and I was wondering if they wanted to talk about it. Several nodded slightly. So, after another brief pause, I reiterated my question, "What do you know about the Slender Man?"

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One girl, sitting in the far corner of the room, began to speak. She knew the character looked like a tall, faceless humanoid wearing a black suit. She mentioned having read some stories that other people had posted about him online. She knew that the character was made-up, although she didn't know where or how it had originated.

Another student told me about watching his brother playing one of the Slender Man video games and being scared by it. Grabbing my laptop, I showed the class an image of a Slender Man monster in a different videogame—Minecraft. A chorus of ahhs suggested the majority of them were familiar with this iteration. Several students mentioned hearing about the Slender Man from the news or from their parents after the stabbing. Others admitted that they had initially learned about the Slender Man from friends or from stories they had heard on the playground.

As we continued to talk, it became obvious that these different entry points were not as discrete as they initially seemed. One student, for example, told me that he had originally heard about the Slender Man through stories told by a friend at school who played the video game. This student later played the game at his friend's house, which, in turn, led him to look up Slender Man videos on YouTube after he returned home. In this instance, the Slender Man bounced from an oral-retelling (based on a mediated product), to a mediated experience, to an exploration of digitally mediated folklore. Many of the students experienced the legend through a similar collection of fragments.

Our discussion that day left me with a lingering set of questions. I had assumed that since the Slender Man was digital folklore, then digitally mediated versions would be the most familiar material for these young "digital natives." Instead, talking to these young people revealed a complex web of introductory points to the Slender Man legend that included elements of oral storytelling, video games, mass media, rumors, social media, horror-themed wikis, fan websites, and YouTube videos which blurred over time. Even though this web included elements that resembled traditional folkloric circulation, they were connected to other new and mass media elements in ways that would not have been possible three decades ago. I began to wonder about how this legend was circulating, not only among children but also adults. How might these online and offline forms of vernacular practice influence each other? What are the implications for the circulation of vernacular practices as digital media becomes increasingly mobile, prevalent, and everyday?

The everyday circulation of vernacular practice in the digital age is a multi-mediated process defined by a sense of increased visibility that creates new opportunities for vernacular collaboration and critique. Technological affordances made available by digital communication technologies have resulted in social norms that encourage the documentation and sharing of everyday behaviors across networks. The result of this shift is that everyday life (including a variety of vernacular practices) becomes both more mediated and more visible. Hence, the technological affordances of the digital age fundamentally extend how vernacular practices circulate. Using everyday performances of the Slender Man legend to illustrate this argument, I suggest that this increased visibility circulates awareness which, in turn, encourages a sense of

collaboration. As users collaborate on creating and sharing vernacular practices, they begin to develop hierarchies of performance that privilege certain types of interaction, creating an atmosphere that facilitates vernacular critique.

Circulation of Vernacular Practice in the Digital Age

In the digital age, the scope of our everyday interactions is no longer constrained by geography (Howard and Blank 2013, 10). For a variety of vernacular practitioners—legend trippers, cryptid enthusiasts, Slender Man costume-makers—the Internet offers the potential to seek out others with similar interests and share their experiences (Howard 2011, 17-18). A group that forms around a shared interest hails engagement from other users that expresses both personal uniqueness and group connectivity (Shifman 2014, 30). This engagement emerges collaboratively and through a variety of media and expressions (including creating, viewing, sharing, remixing, and commenting) (Peck 2015). By documenting and sharing these expressions, users not only demonstrate their group connectivity but also help shape the emergence of future examples of vernacular expression.

Technologies do not dictate how they are used, but they encourage certain uses over others (Winner 1986). The relationship between technology and society is a reciprocal one, in which neither force is solely dominant and each is continually influencing the other (McNeill 2012). Scholars in a variety of disciplines, including communication scholar Nancy Baym as well as sociologists Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman, call this perspective the "social shaping of technology" (Baym 2010, 44-45; MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999). This perspective suggests not only that technologies have certain uses to which they are better or less suited, but also that people often adapt technologies to serve their needs (Baym, Zhang, and Lin 2004, 316).

The term "affordances" refers to the capabilities enabled by a technology (Baym 2010, 17). These affordances influence—but do not determine—use (Baym 2010, 45). A standard household claw hammer, for instance, is well-suited to pounding in a nail. In a pinch, it could also be used as a weapon. It would make a terrible toothbrush. This perspective suggests technology exists in a state of "interpretive flexibility." In other words, different groups can have very different understandings of a technology (MacKenzie and Wajcman 1999, 21); similarly, different groups may also have very different understandings of the customs and norms related to using a technology. As a technology becomes a natural part of daily life, certain norms of behavior begin to form around its usage based on these affordances. This is not to suggest that everyone will use a technology in exactly the same way; technologies provide users with structure while also leaving potential for individualization and variation inside that structure. It does, however, reflect a social pressure that can help us understand the emergence of expectations that undergird a practice. Hence, when discussing the changing nature of how vernacular practices circulate in the digital age, I am neither speaking in absolutes nor determinants. Instead, I am referring to capabilities enabled by digital network technologies and seeking to understand the various ways in which users have engaged that potential.

Digital network technologies are increasingly commonplace in everyday life. As of 2015, over 84 percent of American adults are online, a number that has been holding steady since 2012 (Perrin and Duggan 2015). Due to the proliferation of smartphones, tablets, and other Internet-ready portable devices that we are rarely separated from, more than one-in-five Americans report going online "almost constantly" (Perrin 2015). Pocket-sized digital media devices are ubiquitous. They are perpetually within arm's reach as people move about their everyday lives. While these technologies make it easy to document the everyday, it is the networks they connect to that enable the circulation of this documented media via the click of a button. "The proliferation of visual technologies has become a key aspect of digital culture," writes sociologist Martin Hand, "digital imaging and photography have become thoroughly *ordinary* accompaniments to communication and connection practices in daily life" (2012, 11, emphasis in original). Hand's observation of the mundanity of capturing and sharing everyday experiences on the Internet suggests digital technologies may enable these practices but social norms have embraced the affordances of these technologies in ways that make the documentation and circulation of everyday life not only possible, but also *expected*.

This shift in social norms toward the public sharing of the mundane means that, as individuals document and share their everyday practices across networks, everyday practices become increasingly visible. Communication scholar Zizi Papacharissi notes how the digital age complicates our notions of public and private practice, explaining that "bloggers voluntarily expose the privacy of diary-form introspection to multiple public audiences [and] YouTube videos broadcast context-free pieces of deeply idiosyncratic experiences" (2010, 69). Similarly, social networks provide a space to share pictures of children, vacations, and soon-to-be-consumed meals. Vernacular practices are offered the same potential. One user can document her search for Bigfoot in words and pictures on her blog, another user may upload stories told by his immigrant grandmother to YouTube, a third may post pictures of a homemade Slender Man costume to Reddit or Facebook. In all these instances, formerly private, dyadic, or small-scale vernacular practices become public through remediation. It is these acts of public sharing, that, when done on a mass scale and considered in aggregate (Howard 2011, 19; Howard 2013, 80-81), create new visibility for everyday vernacular practices.

The visibility of everyday life enabled by new media also creates an awareness that individual actions exist as part of a larger body of practice. As everyday acts circulate across networks and become more visible, users begin to recognize them not only as distinct actions but also as parts of a larger practice. Digital communication scholar Limor Shifman observes that by documenting and sharing everyday actions across networks, users make these formerly ephemeral and interpersonal communication events more visible across space and more persistent over time.[1] An adolescent at a sleepover, for example, might use a smartphone to record a friend trying to summon Bloody Mary and later share the video via social media with other friends who weren't present. Similarly, that same adolescent could experience the legend by gathering a

group of friends around the computer to watch videos of Bloody Mary summonings on YouTube that other vernacular users have created. The sum total of these interactions is catalogued across a variety of web locations,[2] allowing previously uninitiated users to quickly learn about the myriad variations at play (Kaplan 2013). This mass sharing inadvertently results in a widely accessible archive of everyday practice where "it only takes a couple of mouse clicks to see hundreds of versions" (Shifman 2014, 30). The outcome of these changes in visibility, Shifman argues, is an increase in user awareness of the overall sum of these actions (2014, 29). In other words, the affordances of the digital age enable users to see their individual actions not only as discrete vernacular expressions but also as connected to a larger body of vernacular practice.

As a practice circulates, accruing increased visibility and awareness, it hails a sense of collaboration from users. Harvard law professor and digital communication scholar Yochai Benkler suggests the following link between widened circulation and hailing participation in the digital age, "The emergence of a new folk culture and of a wider practice of active personal engagement in the telling and retelling of basic cultural themes … makes culture more participatory, and renders it legible to all its inhabitants" (Benkler 2006, 299-300). This legibility comes from the increased recognition of an action as belonging to a larger genre of practice—emerging in light of a constellation of other, similar forms and variations. Visibility and awareness hail collaboration because they translate an idea as a public resource for expression while also making available all the variable ways others have engaged in such expression.

This increase in collaboration also inspires vernacular critique. As vernacular practices circulate across networks and hail collaboration, they inspire competition. More collaboration means more variation, and more variation means users develop ways of categorizing some performances as better (or more authentic) than others. As Whitney Phillips explains in her study of 4Chan, when Internet memes (a popular genre of vernacular practice on the site) started becoming popular in other web locations due to the emergence of exterior meme-based websites and easy-to-use image macro generators, 4Chan users were incensed. This "explosion of participation," sparked by affordances related to digital circulation and creation, made the practice more visible and more collaborative. It became more widely accessible, but users on 4Chan were livid about "the increasing number of 'bad' memes, that is, memes that deviated significantly from the established subcultural format" being shared on more mainstream websites, like Facebook (Phillips 2015, 144). As Phillips demonstrates, when a vernacular practice circulates beyond a single location, there is a rise in the amount of possible variation displayed by users. To respond to this, users engage in acts of vernacular critique that construct and reinforce their own sense of vernacular authority.

This facilitates the creation of hierarchies through which users not only judge vernacular expression but also engage in ongoing acts of vernacular discourse on the nature of the practices themselves. Folklorist Jeff Tolbert, writing on vernacular practices and mediated narratives related to the Slender Man calls this function a "meta-discourse"—a mode of deliberation surrounding a vernacular practice through which

users deliberate about the function, meaning, and significance of that practice (2013). Elsewhere, scholars have drawn on Alan Dundes' (1966) conception of "metafolklore" to suggest the utility of observing folklore as commentary on folklore (Tolbert 2016; Blank 2016). Extending this to consider how vernacular practice comments on vernacular practice, scholars are enabled to, in Tolbert's words, "discover assumptions about what forms specific folklore genres should take, how they should be performed, and who occupies a position of authority on folkloric matters" (2016, 123).

The Many Faces of the Slender Man

On June 10, 2009, SomethingAwful.com user **Victor Surge** posted a pair of photoshopped images to a discussion thread called "Create Paranormal Images." These images were black-and-white and featured children playing in the foreground while a faceless, tall, eerily long-limbed humanoid clad in a black suit lurked behind them. Although Victor Surge presented his contribution with sincerity, the creature was clearly fictitious (Peck 2015, 337). When other users asked Victor Surge if the creature was an original creation, he replied that it was and that he had based it on an amalgamation of horror tropes that scared him. In a few lines of text that accompanied these images, Victor Surge referred to the lurking figure as "the Slender Man."

Although details were sparse, the character gained immediate popularity. As users told stories, shared images, and theorized as to the nature of the nascent Lovecraftian horror, they also participated in its creation. Each performance added to and subtracted from how the entity was imagined by the group. Users critiqued these performances, discussing what elements made them most effective. Successive performances built upon existing performances and discussions. Through social interaction, users collaborated in an ongoing process of performance, interpretation, and negotiation that constructed the details, motifs, and shared expectations of the Slender Man legend cycle. Although the specifics of the creature vary by the telling, the Slender Man usually takes the form of a tall, thin humanoid wearing a black suit. His face is featureless, and it is often shown with long wispy black tendrils emerging from his back. In user-circulated legends, it is often associated with madness, disappearance, and murder.[3] As more and more users began creating and circulating their own variants, the character began to spread beyond the Something Awful forums.

Within a few short years, the Slender Man could be found in a wide variety of digital spaces, including blogs, vlogs, drawings, forums, wikis, stories, photoshops, and augmented reality games. The character was so popular that it had started appearing in a variety of other media. The Slender Man appeared in several video games, including *Slender: The Eight Pages* and its sequel *Slender: The Arrival*. A 2014 episode of the television show *Supernatural* saw the main

characters on the trail of a malevolent photo-lurking entity known as the Thin Man. *Marble Hornets*, a Slender Man web series, has over 55 million views on YouTube, and a *Marble Hornets* movie entered production in the spring of 2013.[4]

As the character circulated online and became more popular, users began to find ways to engage with the legend in offline contexts as well. The most common offline practices inspired by the Slender Man legend cycle include making and wearing Slender Man costumes, playing Slender Man pranks (such as wearing a costume while lurking in a public place or photobombing),[5] creating Slender Man graffiti, or going on Slender Man legend trips (such as hunting the creature in a wooded area at night).

Indeed, the Slender Man legend cycle is noteworthy for the many interrelated ways it is performed in both online and offline contexts. For instance, an individual might first learn about the Slender Man by viewing a combination of pictures, prank videos, and user-written stories posted on the web. That user may then develop an affinity for the character and decide to make a Slender Man costume for Halloween, using what he or she has seen online as a guide. While walking with friends on the way to a Halloween party, that individual could act in character, lurking behind trees and jumping out to scare pedestrians. Friends may shoot photos or record videos using their smartphones and then post the scares to social media sites like Facebook, Reddit, or YouTube. In this act of sharing via networks, the individual act rejoins the chorus of examples that influenced its emergence, becoming another visible example of this vernacular practice.

Since there are so many distinct manifestations and sub-genres of vernacular practice related to the Slender Man, it would be impossible to cover all of them here. Instead, I choose to focus on one specific subset of vernacular practice—the making, wearing, documenting, and sharing of Slender Man costumes.[6] Combining observations of digital communities, ethnographic fieldwork, and in-person interviews, my analysis of this sub-genre of vernacular practice provides an ideal starting point to demonstrate how the affordances of digital communication technologies offer new potential for the circulation of vernacular practice in the digital age.

Capturing the Slender Man Online and Off

For this project, I conducted recorded interviews with six individuals who identified as fans of the Slender Man over the course of 3 months during the summer and early fall of 2014. In the course of these interviews, many of these self-professed fans discussed the web locations they associated with the Slender Man and the places where they had seen examples of people wearing Slender Man costumes. Reddit was the most

Figure 1. A Slender Man costume posted to Reddit's Slender Man forum by user handsomegiant (2014).

frequently mentioned website, although prank videos on YouTube were also notable.

Reddit is a website comprised mainly of user-submitted content and links. Each submission has a comment thread attached to it where users can engage in discussion. Users post their content to specific topic-oriented sub-forums on the website (known as "subreddits"). Many of my interview subjects specifically mentioned the Slender Man subreddit as a place where they had seen Slender Man costumes. As a result, I observed activity on the subreddit from June to November 2014, cataloging any thread that involved a Slender Man costume. I then searched for material posted during the previous three years, in order to capture examples of Slender Man costumes dating back to the subreddit's creation in 2011. By December 2014, I had documented 35 discussion threads involving Slender Man costumes.

On October 19, 2014, Reddit user **handsomegiant** submitted a post titled "My Homemade Slender Man costume" to Reddit's sub-forum dedicated to the Slender Man (r/Slender_Man). In the initial post, handsomegiant provided other users with a photo of himself wearing a Slender Man costume and posing malevolently in a dark wooded area (Figure 1). Many elements of this original post are constructed to demonstrate a working knowledge of the vernacular practices surrounding this legend cycle. By framing the costume as homemade, the user acknowledges that he is engaging in an ongoing vernacular practice and locates this practice on a deeper level than being a casual fan or consumer donning a pre-packaged costume for Halloween.[7] By posing "in character"—choosing an appropriate stance, location, lighting—the image itself also demonstrates knowledge of the legend and asserts what this user feels makes for a good example of vernacular expression, worthy of sharing on social media.

The subsequent discussions in this thread provide typical examples of the collaborative dynamics enabled by the affordances of the digital age. The majority of responses were simple sentiments of appreciation or fear, with users commenting that the costume is "pretty sweet" or "Omg!"[8] However, a few users more actively engaged the original poster. User **NyanDerp**, for example, wrote "Dang, that's not bad for home-made. Make sure you hide in some bushes and scare some people for me! (Extra points if you record it!)." Here this user acknowledges (and appreciates) the challenges of costume-making while also suggesting how to engage in further action. By encouraging handsomegiant to engage, record and upload some behaviors while in costume, this comment overtly demonstrates the widespread expectation for the documentation and sharing of vernacular practice. On this call for further action, handsomegiant writes: "I'm working at a haunted house and I made a 40 year old old man cry. Keep in mind that I'm 6'10 and I added an extra 3ft onto my arms, so my wing span is about 13ft. I got some great reactions!" Here handsomegiant makes up for the lack of further mediation by relaying the experience verbally, and NyanDerp responds appreciatively, "Holy crap, you're my new favorite person. I wish I could do the same, but I'm kind of short and I'm a girl, so yeah. That's amazing, though, I can just imagine their faces as they turned the corner." The description provided by handsomegiant has invited Nyanderp to imagine herself as part of the vernacular experience he shares. Her admission that she probably would be unable to engage in these actions herself turns the tables on this interaction, allowing handsomegiant to offer his own advice, "You could always get stilts! I wanted to get some, but I had no time." This exchange demonstrates the inherently participatory nature of vernacular practice in the digital age, with multiple users engaging to appreciate and perpetuate these practices, thereby displaying both their uniqueness and connectivity.

These collaborative expressions of uniqueness and connectivity enabled by networked communication continue to exert influence on vernacular practices, even in primarily offline contexts. To observe offline expressions of this digital practice, on November 1, 2014, I attended a massive public Halloween celebration in Madison, Wisconsin. Known as "Freakfest," the event attracts tens of thousands of college-aged individuals into the State Street area of the city, encompassing a half-dozen city blocks between the University of Wisconsin and the State Capitol. I was surprised by how many Slender Man appearances I was able to record (Figure 2).

While walking near the Langdon Street neighborhood,[9] I passed a young couple on their way to a party. The man wore a black business suit with a red tie; white gloves hid his hands and a white mask covered and obscured the features of his face (Figure 3 [left]). He was flattered when I stopped to ask him if he was the Slender Man. In briefly talking to the couple it became apparent that he had donned the costume because the young woman he was with had shown him several examples of Slender Man legends, including *Marble Hornets*, *Slender: The Arrival*, and various costumes other users had shared. They were well versed in many of these specific variants. Putting together the costume was easy, they assured me, and just involved combining a mask and gloves with an existing suit and tie combo. The couple reveled in being recognized and

Figure 2. Several examples of Slender Man costumes observed in Madison, Wisconsin on Halloween night 2014. Photos by Andrew Peck, Nicky Kurtzweil, and Emily Sauter.

photographed, and they told me that few people had been able to identify the Slender Man costume. Despite this, the costume had been freaking out several of the other pedestrians they had encountered—serving as an introduction to those unfamiliar with the legend cycle. Although they were not actively documenting the occasion, they hoped the costume would be picked up in the background of photos and videos taken by others.

As they left, the young man reached in his suit and pulled out a folded scrap of paper, one of many in his breast pocket. He handed the note to me. Unfolding it revealed a crude pen drawing of the Slender Man, surrounded by the word "NO" scribbled over-and-over again. This note mimicked a recurring element in many Slender Man stories, where the protagonist is driven to madness because the Slender Man is stalking them. This madness manifests in drawings, vivid dreams, or unhinged mantras. As part of the costume, this couple had created a way to engage in spreading the Slender Man's trademark madness. Although the note was familiar (I instantly recognized the trope it was drawing on), this was the first time I had seen this specific variant. They suggested I was neither the first nor last to receive such a gift that evening. This crumpled note serves as a memento of our encounter (Figure 3 [right]).

From our short interview, it became evident that this couple saw themselves as engaging with a larger networked practice beyond their immediate surroundings. Although many elements of the performance were unique (the details of the costume, how they interacted with passersby, the note), they simultaneously displayed the couple's connectedness to a larger body of vernacular practice. Digital communication enables practices to emerge from users who are more keenly aware of their permutations. These variants are not just in the realm of rumor or word-of-mouth, they can be directly seen and interacted with. As a result, new vernacular actions emerge in more direct conversation with the myriad variants that preceded them, as exemplified by the litany of Slender Man artifacts this couple acknowledged as their inspiration. This suggests that even a singular vernacular act in the digital age has many collaborative

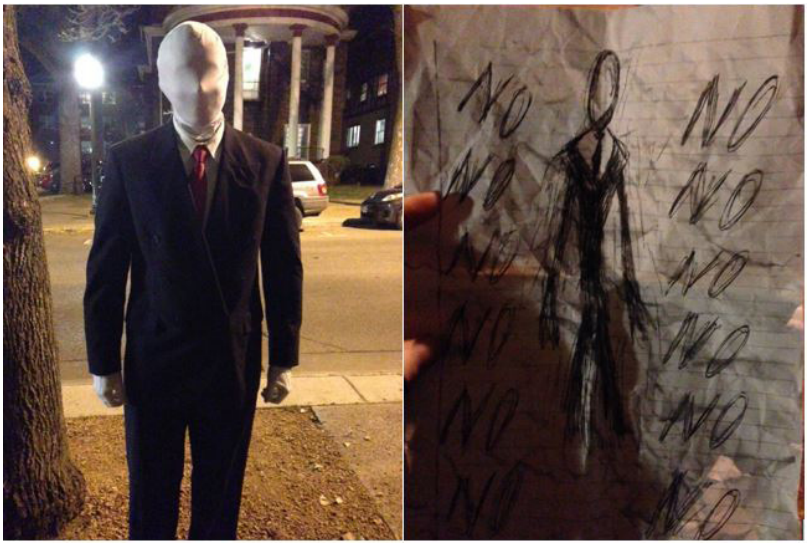

Figure 3. A young man wearing a Slender Man costume on Langdon Street in Madison, Wisconsin for Halloween 2014 (left); one of the many notes he gave out to passersby (right). Photos by Emily Sauter.

facets influenced by the existence of a large vernacular practice. This young couple, for instance, collaborated not only with each other and all the existing variants they had both viewed, but they also hailed others in their immediate vicinity to engage in their vernacular expression—via lurking, jump scares, dropping notes, or even their very presence. They also hoped the costume would be captured on film and recirculated by others, feeding back into the pool of digital variants that had influenced them. Hence, at every level of this process, this couple is co-creating an act of vernacular expression in dialog with the constellation of existing online documents that inspired them. This suggests a blurred boundary between online and offline vernacular practice—they are not discrete and, instead, exist in a continuous, mutually constitutive feedback loop wherein one is always considering the other.

Because of this increase in user awareness and shift in collaborative potential, users are more enabled to engage in acts of vernacular critique. In contrast to the Halloween costume mentioned above, one of my respondents—Ethan, a male in his mid-20s and frequent viewer of the Slender Man on Reddit, Imgur, and YouTube—had a different take on creating an effective Slender Man costume:

> Ethan: I've seen plenty of Slender Man costumes online. The best one I ever saw, the guy wore sheetrocking stilts so he was actually like 10 feet tall. Then he did the blanked out face, and held onto some poles with hands on the end, and I think he had the tendrils coming off of him as well. And he extended the arms and legs on a suit to cover everything.
> Andrew Peck: That sounds pretty elaborate.
> E: Well, if you don't go all out, it's a pretty vague costume.

AP: Just a person in a suit and mask?
E: Pretty much.

This exchange elucidates a tricky tension brought about by the visibility of vernacular practice in the digital age. On one hand, this visibility hails more individuals to view and participate in vernacular practices, but, on the other, users can casually sort through so many variations that they begin to create hierarchies of performance. In Ethan's view—based on, as he admits, the many variants he's seen online—a Slender Man costume is something anyone can do because the barrier to entry is so low. Doing it well, then, requires more than mere reference, it requires showing commitment and knowledge of the fine details of the character.

E: Depends on how well they are playing the part. If they are drinking and laughing and partying and stuff, then I would actually think it's kind of a lame costume. But if they are really into it, I'd probably feel compelled to talk to them, just to be sure.
AP: How would one 'play the part' well?
E: Keep quiet, stay to the back if you are with a group, while alone keep to the shadows. Watch others.

Many of the qualities that my respondents suggested made for a good Slender Man costume—lurking, sneaking into photos, being homemade, and crafting an otherworldly appearance—were elements that made for a more convincing experience. Although individuals differed in their exact preferences, everyone I spoke with had a clear opinion on the matter with no more than minimal hesitation. The fact that different motifs exist and users have different expectations is unsurprising. What is new here is that this element of critique emerges naturally in vernacular discourse in a variety of web locations.

Through vernacular negotiation and critique users circulate and maintain expectations for authenticity in their own vernacular practices, a facet made evident by the two very different discussions that emerged surrounding a pair of Slender Man costume threads posted on Reddit in the fall of 2012. The first thread, which was received poorly, began with an image instructing other users to create the "best halloween costume!" by combining a morph suit with a suit and tie in order to make a Slender Man costume (xXRoflFalafelXx 2012; Figure 4). Amid collaborative suggestions by many users about how to engage while wearing such a costume, several users pushed back against the original post, suggesting this costume lacked effort and authenticity. User **Bazofwaz**, for example, balks at the terrible quality of the costume and suggests that the original poster should consider ways to add more authentic extras, like using stilts for long legs or adding tendrils made from cloth to "do it right." Many other users shared this sentiment, suggesting that the perceived ease of making a Slender Man costume (and the implied lack of effort) depreciated the character's value through overexposure and a lack of originality. As user **Poseidon-SS** noted, "If you go to a Halloween party with this, there will be at least five other people with the same costume" to which user **Kinomi** added "and none of them will be able

Figure 4. Instructions for a simple Slender Man costume posted to Reddit in the fall of 2012.

to drink. DEFINITELY a well thought out costume." This exchange underlines that the frustration shared by many users was about not only the perceived lack of originality, but also—echoing Ethan's comments—a lack of commitment to the character. As Kinomi's comment reveals, the idea of the Slender Man having fun and drinking at a party lies in direct contrast to the expectations held for the vernacular practice by many users—and such *in*action represents the waste of a costume and expressive potential.

Another Slender Man costume discussion thread posted around the same time demonstrates how criticism may emerge differently if the engagement with vernacular practice is received positively. In posting a thread to Reddit titled "I know you guys aren't digging Slender costumes, but I think my buddy was able to pull it off better than the rest" user **The_Bhuda_Palm** acknowledges the myriad of low-effort variants and rhetorically positions this thread as containing something different and worthwhile (The_Bhuda_Palm 2012). Unlike the "best halloween costume!" thread, this user's original post shares several pictures that document The_Bhuda_Palm's friend getting into an elaborate homemade Slender Man costume and wearing it while skulking around a dark suburb (Figure 5). The costume used stilts and wooden planks to provide the illusion of elongated, unnatural limbs. Many users directly expressed their appreciation for this play toward authenticity, with user **Drewboy64** commenting that "the pants are a bit baggy, but finally, someone actually acknowledging the fact that the slenderman is supposed to be slender." Furthermore, the criticism in this post (regarding the baggy pant legs) provided a moment for collaboration, with many users offering suggestions to refine the costume to make it even more authentic. User **SewCreative** offered the most in-depth advice on circumventing this issue:

> Sewing contractor here, Cheap elastic webbing in the area's of bending & contact,

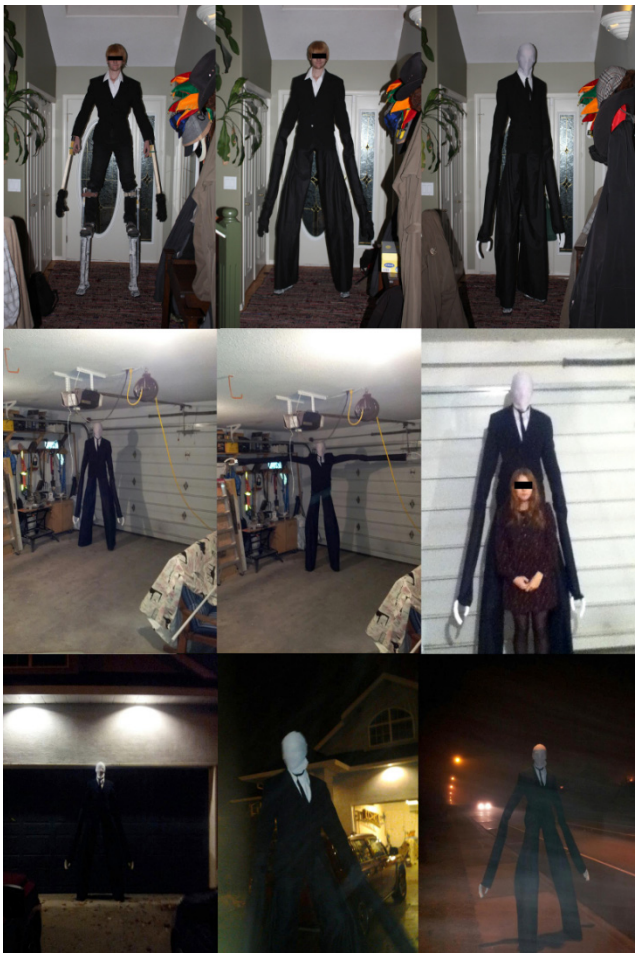

Figure 5. A series of photographs posted by Reddit user The_Bhuda_Palm in October 2012 gives an in-depth look at how his friend constructed and wore a Slender Man costume.

while placing elastic loops on the bottom pant legs would give him optimal tightness. The only issue to this would be reinforcing the waist line to keep the pants up.
[…]
Do the sides of the pant legs have zippers? Or are they slip overs? I suggest cutting down the inner sides of the pant legs and sticking adhesive Velcro to the stilts and inside pant leggings if the above option is out of question. The issue to the velcro is; lowered mobility, sewing on zippers with extra fabric on the zipline, & if not done properly, will cause a crease in the fabric that will be noticed by angle.
Cheers, and if you have any questions feel free to send me a PM ["Private message"].

As shown by this comment (and many others like it in the thread), even well-received instances of vernacular practice offer the space for vernacular critique. This critique differs from those in the poorly regarded "best halloween costume!" thread by offering constructive feedback to help refine the costume. In this instance, a

reciprocal relationship between collaboration and criticism emerges. In this example of vernacular practice, the vernacular dynamics of collaboration and critique enabled by the affordances of the digital age constitute two parts of a singular whole—here collaboration enables critique while critique facilitates collaboration.

The stakes for these exchanges are social clout, what many of my respondents called a type of Internet prestige or "nerd cred," further underlining the shared nature of vernacular practice in the digital age. As Rob, a 27-year-old male, put it:

> I think 'Internet prestige' is a good word for it. You know, it's something that you could, if you're looking for karma or points or whatever your current forum uses for currency, it would be a safe bet to create content based on the Slender Man if you were, you know, really good at it. And put something out there if it was kinda creepy and people would eat it up.

When pressed on why this might be the case, Rob suggested that the often insular nature of web communities that engage in these vernacular practices exerted great force on the potential for engagement. Like an inside joke, the Slender Man relies on the paradox of simultaneously being known while also being niche. If it strides too far toward either direction, it loses appeal to users, becoming too overdone or too obscure. The dynamics of collaboration and critique enabled by the digital age work to both propagate and police widespread engagement. Hence by engaging in acts of collaboration and critique in the pursuit of asserting "nerd cred," these users are also self-regulating their own vernacular practices.

"What do you know about the Slender Man?"

"Is the Slender Man real?" I asked the group of middle schoolers near the end of our day together. The Internet-savvy girl in the corner firmly shook her head, but other students—many of whom had learned about the legend in more fragmented ways—seemed less certain. Many looked to her or me for confirmation and began shaking their heads as well. One boy, who looked a little younger than his peers, seemed unsettled by the conversation and asked me if I was sure the Slender Man wasn't real. His brother, he elaborated, had shown him a picture online that appeared to have the Slender Man in it. It looked very real. Raising my hand into an oath position, I promised him (100%, on my honor as an expert, hope to die) that the Slender Man was not real. He seemed to breathe a sigh of relief and smiled.

As I compiled my data for this project some months later, this boy's question began to seem less and less unusual. After all, I had seen, met, and talked with a number of "real"[10] Slender Men over the course of the last several months. I'd seen even more online, and many of those digital pictures were created to seem as authentic as possible. Indeed, for the adults and young adults I had been observing, these were the very qualities that emerged as important through the collaboration and vernacular critique made possible by the affordances of the digital age. This boy's question reminded me that even though the digital age allows for the creation of a huge variety of mediated documents that capture and circulate vernacular practice, this constellation

of fragments merely provides the starting point for user interpretation and discussion, and there are too many fragments for any single user to see all of them. Like stars in the sky, certain forms become more visible than others and different groups draw different lines between them. Although these children knew about many of the same mediated vernacular practices that influenced my adult respondents, they connected them in their own ways. As danah boyd reminds the reader in her study of adolescents' digital media use, being raised in a digital world does not make one a "digital native." In fact the idea of a digital native ignores the often difficult, trial-and-error based process of learning to communicate and evaluate information online (boyd 2014).

The adults I observed and the children I spoke with initially seemed very difficult to reconcile. However, understanding the changes in circulation of vernacular practice in the digital age revealed significant similarity between these two groups. Elements like circulation (and the visibility and awareness it creates) remained constant across both age groups. For both groups, these facets served as the basis for further vernacular practice and discussion. The difference occurred in the *ways* each group participated in and discussed the vernacular practice. This is a matter not of digital circulation but of everyday acts of *interpretation*, which emerge from different contexts and cultural groups. Because of the nature of how vernacular practice circulates in the digital age, both groups evolved in similar ways toward different outcomes.

Notes

1 Specifically, Shifman is writing about Internet memes, which several folklorists have also suggested constitute a genre of vernacular expression (see Foote 2007; McNeill 2012; Kaplan 2013; Blank 2015). Lynne McNeill, for instance, writes that, "The emergence of traditional expressive forms on the Internet, and the observation and re-creation of them by other people in new contexts, has not gone unnoticed by the Internet community itself, which has adopted the concept of *memes* to identify what folklorists would call folklore" (2009: 84, emphasis in original). Trevor Blank offers a similar viewpoint, "In computer-mediated contexts, the folkloric process of repetition and variation is often identified by emergent patterns of widely disseminated, visually oriented vernacular expression; these constructs are emically referred to as *memes*" (2012: 8). Although the term is still somewhat contentious in folkloristics (see Ellis 2001: 76-80; Oring 2014), many scholars agree regarding the folkloric nature of the underlying vernacular practice.

2 To provide an example germane to my case study, a user making a Slender Man costume may post a video of herself wearing the costume to YouTube, link that video on a creepypasta discussion board, and post a picture of herself in costume to the r/creepy subreddit.

3 For additional background on the nature and key characteristics of the Slender Man, see Peck (2015) and Tolbert (2013).

4 Production was later halted due to a copyright dispute.

5 "Photobombing" is a colloquial term describing the act of intentionally sneaking into the background of someone else's photograph without their awareness in an effort to disrupt the picture's integrity. In this instance, such an act mimics the "lurking in the background" trope frequently used in visual expressions of the Slender Man legend.

6 Such behavior represents individuals enacting elements of the Slender Man legend cycle

in everyday life, a type of behavior that folklorists call "ostension." For a more in-depth discussion of the Slender Man, ostension, and the digital age, see Peck 2016.

7 Commercial Slender Man costumes were widely available in 2014 (Mejia 2014). I did not find any instances of them in either online or offline observations, but the large amount of costume submissions to this subreddit suggests the separation from commercial costuming is an important rhetorical move.

8 "Omg!" is Internet shorthand for "Oh my god!" and indicates this user found the costume well-done and unsettling.

9 Langdon Street is located one block north of State Street (the central venue for Halloween festivities near the University of Wisconsin) and home to most Greek life on campus.

10 As this paper has shown, real-life, embodied performances and digital media co-create the production and circulation of authenticity. So, in this instance, "real" is a loaded term. These costume-wearing legend performers are imitating material they had seen online in order to play at being the "real" Slender Man. One could argue that the "real" Slender Man is actually an idea that circulates online, belonging simultaneously to both everyone and no one. Such an interpretation is significant because it complicates popular conceptions of authenticity that privilege the embodied ("real") over the digital.

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The Moroccan Diaspora in Istanbul:
Experiencing Togetherness through Participatory Media

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Abstract
This ethnographic study examines how participatory media reshape the life-worlds of members of a Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul. Based on long-term fieldwork in the Turkish megacity, semi-structured interviews with Moroccan nationals residing in Istanbul alongside evidence from participant observation online and offline are analyzed. The in-depth investigation seeks to more comprehensively understand digital communication within contemporary diasporas. Its findings suggest that the widespread use of participatory media among members of the Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul facilitates the emergence of a new realm of lived experience in their quotidian life.

Keywords: participatory media; life-world; vernacular web; Moroccan diaspora; Istanbul

Digital Devices and Life-worlds

Hicham sits at a small round table outside his restaurant in the Kadıköy district of Istanbul. Most of his lunchtime customers have returned to their offices nearby. He smokes a cigarette and has a cup of coffee now that the first busy phase of the day is over. Hicham, who is in his late 30s, moved from Marrakesh to Istanbul in 2014. He is about to make the final arrangements for the evening. To plan for the evening business, he produces his tablet and opens the Facebook page he created for his restaurant. He has three new messages which were sent to place personal orders for the evening. Communicating with potential customers and friends is a daily routine of Hicham's professional and private life. His quotidian experience has been largely transformed by digital devices.

This ethnographic investigation examines how participatory media reshaped the life-worlds of members of a Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul. The World Wide Web (WWW) has become a social force that rapidly changed the everyday lives of its users (Boellstorff 2008, 42). The common use of email and instant chat applications prompted considerable change in corporate cultures, while social networking sites and blogs altered the parameters of social relationships and civil society. Paradoxically, the web is considered both a tool for freedom and a means of surveillance. Although the web is often described as a vehicle for free expression reinforcing civil society, it is also associated with a dramatic loss of modern-day privacy. The growing influence of digital communication becomes most tangible in people's life-worlds which can be seen as the social reality in which individuals gain experiences, communicate, think, and feel (Schütz and Luckmann, 1989).

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Evolving within personal networks, a life-world is a domain of immediate social existence (Jackson 1996, 7; Coleman 2010, 50). Life-worlds are furthermore divided into several fields of being, where individuals interact with one another and make sense of their social existence. Each field of being can establish its own rules and norms (Wiencke 2008, 14). A person's life-world is the context of their lived experience (Porter 1996, 31). For example, a teenager who decides to join a music club opens up a new field of being and gains new experiences by communicating with fellow club members during practice sessions and club outings. To integrate into this field of being, the teenager needs to learn how to play an instrument and develop other skills.

Documenting the perspectives of members of a Moroccan diaspora community on their use of participatory media, the main purpose of this paper is to more comprehensively understand digital communication processes within contemporary diasporas. Participatory media can be understood as networked computing devices enabling a two-way communication among their users. In the context of this investigation, the use of participatory media is conceived as a set of cultural practices involving the adding and changing of pictorial, textual, or audio-visual content in digital environments. Web users attach cultural meanings to these digital practices while using digital devices for different reasons or in varied situations. Overthrowing traditional dichotomies of media content producers and consumers, participatory media facilitated the emergence of the vernacular web (Howard 2008, 500).

Drawing on the idea of the vernacular, this investigation provides much-needed insights into the fusion of the vernacular web and digital diasporas. This article fills this lacuna by examining digital practices of members of a Moroccan diaspora community in depth. Based on long-term fieldwork in urban areas of Istanbul as well as in digital environments, I argue that the widespread use of participatory media among members of a Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul facilitated the emergence of a new realm of lived experience in their life-worlds. Following a brief presentation of the methods used during the investigation, the first main section of this article addresses the evolution of the Moroccan diaspora in a digital age. The second part describes the circulation of vernacular discourses among members of a Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul. In the final section light is shed on how digital devices enabled virtual mobility among members of the community under investigation.

Methodology

Two complementary methods were employed in the course of this ethnographic investigation. Data was collected through in-depth interviewing and participant observation during 17 months of fieldwork in Istanbul. 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Moroccan residents of Istanbul to understand how they make sense of the use of digital devices in their daily lives. Thanks to its open-ended questioning style, the interview technique elicited the cultural meanings research participants assign to their uses of digital devices. Although the vast majority of interviews were held face-to-face in Istanbul, a small number of interviews were carried out online. Snowball sampling proved to be an effective data collection

strategy. I was often introduced to further interviewees by their friends, which directly increased their trust in me. The language spoken during interviews was mainly French, which is an important educational language in Morocco to this day. However, some research participants preferred to be interviewed in English. Residents of Istanbul who identified themselves as 'Moroccan nationals' were selected to participate in the investigation. Participant observation at local events in Istanbul eased the recruitment of interviewees. For example, I attended a feast during the *Kurban Bayramı* (*Eid al-Adha*) in Hicham's restaurant in Kadıköy, and often socialized with people whom I later interviewed. My status as a newcomer to Istanbul helped me build rapport with research participants. We often shared our experiences of arrival, accommodation search, and encounters with the Turkish bureaucracy.

During the fieldwork, I was mainly referred to as a friend of male Moroccan nationals, who were often near the same age as myself. By accompanying them in their daily lives, I identified Hicham's restaurant and other field sites. The interview materials contained plenty of narratives of digital engagement, naming digital environments, in which participant observation was also conducted. Going digital has often become an essential feature of ethnographic methodologies since an increasing amount of everyday interactions take place online (e. g. Miller and Slater 2000; Murthy 2008; Underberg and Zorn 2014). The data set consisted of interview transcripts, observation records describing encounters in physical localities, and untold conversations taken from digital environments. I mainly assessed Facebook groups and forums of expat blogs which were mentioned by research participants during the interviews. The analysis of the data was committed to the techniques and procedures of the grounded theory (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

The digital practices discussed in this article are thus based on systematic coding and grounded in saturated categories. The investigation into digital communication within a Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul also raised some ethical questions. A major concern was the negotiation of informed consent in digital environments. The conversations I explored on platforms often involved numerous persons and it was barely possible to inform each and every participant about the scope and aims of the investigation. To avoid exposing private information of vulnerable people and personal details, names of semi-public network locations were removed. Furthermore, continued research into digital environments can easily blur the boundaries between fieldwork and the researcher's private life since field sites cannot be left by simply taking a plane. Ethnographic researchers who get involved in digital interactions need to find the right balance between their investigative desire and the protection of their privacy.

The Moroccan Diaspora in a Digital Age

Long before the concept of nationhood emerged, populations were scattered over large territories and people who shared the same identity lived in dispersed constellations. The term diaspora can be broadly defined as a social configuration of transnational connections of individuals who identify with the same roots, practices, or languages.

Etymologically speaking, the word diaspora derives from the Greek word διασπορά, which means scattering of seeds. Recent definitions of the term still retain the original meaning of scattering and dispersion. The capitalized form of the word refers to the settling of scattered colonies of Jews outside Palestine after the Babylonian exile (Gove *et al*. 1993). In the 20th century, the term mainly referenced the paradigmatic case of the Jewish Diaspora. Within the social sciences and humanities, the term diaspora proliferated in the early 2000s. Although the meaning of the term was broadened, a strong emphasis on the homeland of dispersed peoples was initially maintained and diaspora scholars increasingly focused on further traditional diasporas, for example the Armenian, Greek, and Irish cases. Subsequently, trade diasporas and religious communities whose members were connected across national borders were also conceptualized as diasporas. A new wave of conceptual innovations in diaspora research was inspired by the digital revolution.

In 1991, the first HTML browser enabled its users to send files, such as texts and graphics, through computer networks. In the mid-2000s, the WWW underwent a major transformation. Tim O'Reilly popularized the term web 2.0 referencing a new generation of dynamic websites that simplified creation and amendment of web content. These revolutionary developments inspired many leading members of diasporas to implement digital communication methods in their transnational networks. Diasporas of the 21st century are not only connected by family networks, the physical travel of their members, and the flow of remittances, but also involve digital communication. The digital revolution created a myriad of new transnational connections and reconfigured historically developed cross-border ties. The term digital diaspora is widely associated with collections of dispersed individuals who share a common identity, engage in common cultural practices, and maintain cross-border ties online. The web provides much greater potential for diasporic connectivity than any previous method of communication. Numerous organizations supporting diasporas have created websites and blogs that enhance the dissemination of information within their circles. Many contemporary diasporas were explored with regard to the use of digital devices (e.g. Axel 2004; Whitaker 2004; Bernal 2005; Srinivasan 2006; Christie 2008; Brinkerhoff 2009; Molyneaux et al. 2014).

Although the burgeoning body of scholarship that delves into the use of new media within diasporas has significantly advanced the understanding of contemporary diasporas, not enough is known about diasporic strategies on the vernacular web. By combining approaches from folkloristics, anthropology, and media studies, this article makes a case for studying present-day diasporas and transnational mobility in an interdisciplinary manner. First, the Moroccan diaspora is examined through the lens of the vernacular. Participatory media, which are increasingly used by members of diasporas, are hybrid entities conflating vernacular discourses and institutional structures. The vernacular and the institutional are interdependent entities forming a dynamic relationship in participatory media (Howard 2008, 498). Paradoxically, vernacular discourses can empower themselves by interacting with institutional forces. The advent of web 2.0 technologies, that enable the exchange of complex

data, including texts, photographs, and audio-visual content, heralded a new era for transnational connectedness. Social networking sites create a plethora of hybridized texts that incorporate vernacular and institutional content and agency (Howard 2008, 501).

The set of participatory media that is explored in depth in this article can be conceived as an interface between institutional structures and vernacular discourses. These network locations are sustainable nodes in the vernacular web. Participatory media empower their users to articulate their opinions and alterity. On social networking sites and blogs, vernacular discourses can circulate across borders. In addition to facilitating the circulation of online content, the vernacular web can be considered a gigantic apparatus generating local, translocal, and transnational ties. The development of diasporas depends to a large extent on their ability to generate strong local and transnational connections. Second, this article is anchored in an anthropological take on life-worlds (e.g. Coleman 2010, 50). The focus on the use of digital devices in the life-worlds of members of the Moroccan diaspora makes an in-situ assessment of media practices in both physical and digital localities possible. Third, the study also integrates an approach from media studies by placing emphasis on participatory media literacies (Rheingold 2008, 97). Such literacies are at the bottom of establishing new public voices.

In order to understand how digital communication works within contemporary diasporas, this investigation into the use of participatory media among Moroccan residents of Istanbul is put in the context of the recent evolution of the Moroccan diaspora. The Moroccan people have a long-standing history of dispersal. Since its independence from France in 1956, the Kingdom of Morocco has experienced significant levels of emigration (e.g. Aslan 2015). In the 1960s, Moroccan-born 'low-skilled' workers came to various countries in Western Europe after the Moroccan government had reached bilateral agreements on labor migration with Belgium, France, then West Germany, and the Netherlands. Since the 1990s, Moroccan nationals increasingly settled in Spain and Italy. In the early 21st century, highly skilled Moroccan nationals tended to emigrate to the USA and Canada (Bourkharouaa *et al.* 2014). In 2012, about 3.3 million Moroccan citizens lived abroad, some 10% of the total national population (MPC 2013). Turkey has only recently become a notable destination for Moroccan nationals. Much evidence suggests that they predominately considered Turkey as a temporary transition zone. Many Moroccan residents of Istanbul whom I met in the course of the investigation aspired to move on to other destinations. The free trade agreement between Turkey and Morocco, which came into force in 2006, prompted an increase in Moroccans traveling to Turkey. Subsequently, visa requirements were lifted for Moroccan nationals in 2007. The number of Moroccan arrivals in Turkey increased from 11,791 to 77,884 between 2001 and 2012 (TÜİK, 2013; quoted from İçduygu 2013, 45). Although current Moroccan newcomers to Istanbul come from various socio-demographic backgrounds, the vast majority of Moroccan nationals who took part in this ethnographic investigation identified as middle-class (Ritter 2015, 54).

Members of the present-day Moroccan diaspora engage with various online

platforms to facilitate the communication among communities located in different countries. These platforms can be understood as nodes of the vernacular web which enhance the circulation of information among members of the Moroccan diaspora. Two main types of digital engagement in participatory media can be distinguished. First, representatives of the Moroccan state created digital environments that seek to connect Moroccan citizens living abroad. Second, numerous Moroccan nationals residing in Morocco or abroad increased their participatory media literacy and expressed vernacular discourses online. As early as the 1960s, the Moroccan government acknowledged the potential of its expatriate population and launched several campaigns aiming to reconnect Moroccan citizens living abroad to their homeland. The Moroccan state expected its emigrants to make remittance payments to their families, which often conflicted with integration policies in the receiving countries. The skills and knowledge of emigrants were considered a driving force for the economic development and modernization of Morocco (de Haas 2007, 4). In the 1990s, the Moroccan government changed its attitude towards its emigrants and began to court them (de Haas 2007, 20). Although the government maintained its interest in emigrants' economic development potential, it embraced dual citizenship and welcomed Moroccan emigrants who returned to their country of origin for holidays. Like many other countries with high rates of emigration, the Moroccan state adopted a policy that encourages diaspora engagement among its emigrants. The digital engagement of the Moroccan state is one element of this new strategy.

An example of the digital strategy is the website www.maghribcom.gov.ma, which was launched in 2013 by Abdellatif Mâazouz, the Moroccan Minister for Moroccan Citizens Living Abroad and Migration Affairs. The initial idea behind this site was to connect members of the Moroccan diaspora to their country of origin and harness their expertise for the development of the various sectors of the Moroccan economy. Maghribcom also created a Facebook page, where posts can reach anyone who 'liked' the page. On December 21 2015 the following message was posted:

> The Minister for Moroccan Citizens Living Abroad and Migration Affairs is pleased to welcome you to his social media space. The use of social media by the Minister complements the use of traditional means of communication for the diffusion of official information and information that is essential for the success of his mission. Please join us on Facebook (URL is added, C.R.) and Twitter (URL is added, C.R.).

This post illustrates the interconnectedness of network locations. Many members of the Moroccan diaspora experience this network location as a portal to other nodes and media. The web developed into a multi-layered environment, in which users can rapidly switch from platform to platform. Members of the Moroccan diaspora managed to reconfigure the interconnectedness of diaspora communities and homeland by accessing platforms with smart phones and tablets. These mobile devices profoundly reshaped how people who reside in distant locations interact with one another. Since smart phone users are potentially available anytime and everywhere, they can access online platforms on the go and can simultaneously get involved in local events. Two

further websites were popular with members of the Moroccan diaspora community under investigation: larbi.org and yabiladi.com. Both digital environments intended to connect Moroccan emigrants to their homeland and were also interlinked with Facebook and Twitter. The digital environment yabiladi.com published news about Morocco and invited its users to get involved in online forums. In addition to these 'official' digital environments, numerous research participants visited further websites that enabled the circulation of vernacular discourses. For example, some interviewees expressed their appreciation for the blogs riadzany.blogspot.com, which regularly posted stories from the Moroccan city Fez, and altasmedias.com, which was created by Moroccan residents of Montreal, Canada.

The digital revolution rapidly altered life-worlds around the globe and is often considered one of the most significant societal transformations since the industrial revolution (e.g. Rheingold 2008, 99). Despite optimistic outlooks, unequal access to the web persists within numerous societies and on a global level. Many members of the Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul under consideration here made use of participatory media on a daily basis thereby changing the ways in which they communicate. By creating content on the vernacular web, they transformed how symbolic meanings of cultural heritages were constructed within the Moroccan diaspora. Traditionally, many social and cultural anthropologists explored solely the ability of Moroccan people to press Argan oil, prepare food, and produce handicraft in terms of cultural heritage. These tangible heritages include the making of material objects, for example tagine meals and lamps. In recent years, numerous Moroccan nationals have participated in constructing the symbolic meanings of their cultural heritages by referring to material heritage objects in digital environments. Comprehensive digital skill sets are required to create and alter born-digital 'materials', such as code, images, contributions to online forums, website architectures, blog content, and posts on Facebook.

In stark contrast to traditional heritage practices, these materials *originate* in digital form (Economou 2015, 224). In other words, digital heritage materials emerge in and circulate through digital environments. Participatory media invite everybody to get involved in the interpretation and construction of heritage (Fairclough 2012, xvi). The construction of cultural heritages involves both things and words. The interpretation of artifacts in museums is often guided by signs placed next to the object. A song performed during a festive event or other intangible expressions can become objects after being recorded by a smart phone. Cultural heritages are constructed through the manifold negotiations of their symbolic meanings. Participatory media complicate this process. It is possible to assign meaning to a ritual dance by sharing a photograph of it on participatory media. Words and things take on new lives as digital surrogates, copies, and remixes (Hennessy 2008, 346). The ethnographic evidence from this investigation suggests that a large number of Moroccan residents of Istanbul acquired digital skill sets and variously created born-digital materials. In doing so, they established many network locations, where vernacular discourses could be expressed. In the next section, light is shed on these nodes of the digital Moroccan diaspora and

the perspectives of Moroccan nationals on digital devices are examined.

Facilitating Local Networks among Moroccan Nationals in the Turkish Megacity

The Moroccan diaspora can be explored as a social configuration that primarily consists of various dispersed communities and a homeland. Members of Moroccan diaspora communities are often loosely connected and seek to establish meeting places where they can create support networks. Community can be seen as an aggregate of individuals who share a common culture, are conscious of their distinctiveness, and develop a sense of togetherness. Ever since participatory media became popular with Moroccan nationals living abroad, connections with fellow Moroccan citizens have been created in physical and digital environments. Various overlapping systems of circulation evolved within the Moroccan diaspora in recent decades. Traditionally, the movement of people, capital, and goods could be observed within these systems that held the homeland and the numerous diaspora communities together. With the emergence of new media, these three forms of movement were complemented by cascades of texts, videos, and images.

The desire for free expression and the potential for reaching out to a global audience are often motivations to use new media. However, the movement of digitized information cannot be completely detached from its materiality. Technological infrastructures enable or hamper the circulation of information. The use of digital devices within contemporary diasporas and therein the internal circulation of discourses can be observed in semi-public digital environments. Improving their participatory media literacy (Rheingold 2008, 99), numerous Moroccan residents of Istanbul regularly engaged in conversations on digital environments and learned how to administer such network locations. Vernacular discourses can occur on social networking sites, where they merge with the institutional into hybrid texts. Two digital environments frequented by many Moroccan nationals who took part in this study illustrate the circulation of vernacular discourses within the Moroccan diaspora and provide crucial insights into the fusion of contemporary diasporas and the vernacular web.

The first digital environment that exposes the patterns of digital communication among Moroccan residents of Istanbul is a Facebook account that Hicham created for his Moroccan restaurant in Istanbul. The restaurant, which was opened in the Kadıköy district in the early summer of 2015, quickly became a central meeting place for many Moroccan nationals living in the vicinity. A 50-year-old teacher described how he experienced the restaurant:

> Before I started to go to this restaurant – I have been here for almost 16 years – before going there I didn't contact any Moroccans. I didn't have any relations with Moroccans at all. I was invited to that restaurant. I didn't meet... I only met Moroccans when I went to Ankara, to the embassy and the consulates there. This restaurant is really an important place. The owner became a friend of mine. We became friends. It's like… I mean, I go there. We sit down. We talk about our lives. About our problems, you know.

> You feel you can go to a place where you can talk to people. They can understand me much better.

The interviewee became a regular in the restaurant and enjoyed the company of his close friends. He considered the restaurant as a place where he can reflect on his life.

In addition to people living nearby, Moroccan residents scattered all over the megacity sporadically came to the restaurant to meet friends. The place is not only frequented by Moroccan nationals, but also very popular with people from other backgrounds who appreciate Moroccan cuisine. The restaurant, however, facilitated the emergence of a local Moroccan diaspora community since its increased online visibility via Facebook quickly came to the attention of numerous Moroccan residents of Istanbul. According to an Arab Social Media Report (DSG 2011), 7.5% of the Moroccan population used Facebook in 2010. Four years later, the figure had leapt to 86% in the country (DSG 2015). Hicham's digital engagement was initially driven by commercial interests, but the digital environment he created quickly developed its own dynamics:

> Initially, we had the idea to open a Moroccan café. We made Moroccan coffee and everything. But then Ramadan began and many Moroccan communities came to me and asked: Why do you not make the Iftar? It is the dinner during Ramadan. So we started with the idea of Iftar. It worked out well. During Ramadan the restaurant was full every evening. We didn't even find enough space for the people. After Ramadan some people asked me: Why do you not make Moroccan dishes: tagines, couscous, pastillas, and things like that? I started to think about it. I created a Facebook page and many people came… I think sometimes it's good that I opened this place here. In this way, Moroccans can meet and talk. We can speak Arabic. We can joke in Arabic and all that. You miss this, when you are abroad…

> I have this [Facebook, C. R.] page and the people who come send me a message. I will show you a message… [He opens the Facebook page on his tablet.] For example, here: "We will come for dinner Tuesday evening." They all order through Facebook. They send me sometimes photos and tell me what they were doing. We share stuff on the internet. Here is another one: "We are two persons. We would like to eat a beef tagine and couscous with chicken. Thanks." This is important for me. That's why I am always online. People can always order and ask questions or make suggestions for dishes... 100 people like the page.

The Facebook account, first and foremost, enabled Hicham to advertise his restaurant and post information about the prepared menu. For example, in order to reach out to his customers he posted images of tagines and tea glasses alongside a Moroccan proverb. He also posted photos of events that took place in the restaurant and tagged the visitors. As a result, social ties with and among visitors were strengthened and mediated in digital environments, with restaurant visitors and friends engaging with posts and photographs taken.

In September 2015, the author of a popular Moroccan cookery book gave a

presentation in the restaurant. This too was mediated digitally, pre-advertised and then documented on the restaurant's Facebook page. The Facebook thread also connected its 'followers and friends' with other network locations, such as news websites and blogs. About 150 people were linked to Hicham's Facebook page, either as friends or through its like-button. Born-digital materials could be created and shared on the thread. For instance, Hicham compiled a photo album portraying the 'blue city' of Chefchaouen. The nostalgic photo album of the UNESCO immaterial world heritage is part of the born-digital materials Moroccans living abroad created about their cultural heritages. The series of photographs was created with the GIF animation application Picasion and posted on the Facebook thread. The photographs showed the tight alleys of Chefchaouen, including carpets and pottery laid out in front of blue doors and walls. This album epitomizes how material heritage objects can be transformed into digital surrogates and how their symbolic meanings can be renegotiated in a digital context.

Vernacular discourses on Moroccan food and Moroccan cities took place in untold network locations, which were often facilitated by social networking sites. Facebook accounts, like the one Hicham created, can constitute the social realities of users since online stories and imagery may influence how they experience their physical environments. For new arrivals from Morocco, digital environments were a vital source of information that helped them get oriented in the megacity. Another digital environment in which vernacular discourses could occur was the Facebook group *Le Maroc A İstanbul*. This network location was primarily initiated to connect new arrivals from Morocco to other more experienced members of the Moroccan diaspora or further local communities. The description of this Facebook group, which had about 630 members, encouraged potential new members to get involved:

> If you are a Moroccan living in Istanbul, or you had already lived in Morocco for some years and moved to Istanbul, come and join our group to share your experiences and opinions, and give advice and support to new arrivals… Solidarity, sharing, enrichment, meetings…

This extract indicates how digital environments can mediate the creation of local communities. Numerous research participants reported that they experienced their neighborhoods as highly anonymous upon first arriving in the megacity. Many reported it was very difficult to get in touch with neighbors, living in six-storied accommodation common in Istanbul. However, the Facebook group *Le Maroc A İstanbul* could be found easily with a quick search on Facebook. This Facebook group eased the first steps in the new environment for many new arrivals. The most common initial information requests in this digital environment were regarding accommodation, job opportunities, and schools in Istanbul.

The analysis of the two network locations on Facebook revealed the perspectives of members of a Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul on participatory media. They considered social networking sites as tools to create and maintain local networks with fellow Moroccan residents of Istanbul. Born-digital materials, including texts,

self-made videos, and photographs, circulated on the network locations that linked Moroccan diaspora communities and their homeland. Both digital environments described above were nodes of the vernacular web and facilitated the circulation of vernacular discourses. Participatory media have transformed the life-worlds of members of the Moroccan diaspora community under study since their arrival in the Turkish metropolis. Many research participants reported that digital devices became considerably more significant in their lives after their move to Istanbul.

Life-worlds between Local Involvement and Virtual Togetherness

Members of the Moroccan diaspora community under investigation did not only make use of participatory media to create local networks but also to engage in virtual mobility. The concept of virtual mobility is often associated with communication structures of multinational corporations that seek to influence the behavior of their employees in geographically distant subsidiaries. However, many other individuals established virtual connections and communicate within dispersed communities. The ubiquitous use of digital devices has transformed the ways social relationships are sustained. Digital devices are not only technological gadgets but increasingly gain significance as social objects and sites of sociality (Germann Molz 2006, 377).

Numerous members of the Moroccan diaspora community under discussion in this article intensively used digital devices in their everyday lives. They often bought new smart phones upon arrival in Istanbul to be closely connected with family members and friends they left behind in Morocco. Their digital devices can thus be considered sites of sociality. In the context of this investigation, virtual mobility is defined as the ability to be present and participate from a distance (Buescher and Urry 2009, 101). By using digital devices, individuals can be present in two or more locations, yet exert their influence on remote situations. Thanks to the use of mobile technologies, information can instantaneously move within digital environments (Cocq 2016, 147). By communicating on Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Instagram, and Viber, members of the Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul managed to influence decisions of their families back in Morocco. A 41-year-old hostel receptionist described how he used these online platforms:

> I usually use Facebook, Viber, and Skype. Facebook is the best for social networking. I use Viber to make free calls and to write messages to my contacts. Mainly to friends and family in Morocco. I use Skype more to chat with and write to my professional contacts who live all over the world. They are from various countries: from Turkey, from Canada, from the United States, from Australia, from the Arab world, from Morocco and Algeria.

Participatory media made it possible to maintain many facets of social relationships while being geographically distant. Logging on to Facebook, emailing friends and family back in Morocco, uploading photos, sharing hyperlinks to websites, and sending text messages across continents were daily routines of many research participants. Such virtual mobility involves a type of sociality that revolves around movement,

communication, and technology. Digital devices enable individuals to be both here and there, absent and present. Almost always carrying smart phones, whether in their professional and private lives, members of the Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul experienced perpetual contacts on the move. When perpetual contacts with distant people are maintained, time and space are reconfigured (Katz and Aakhus 2002, 12).

Socializing with remote friends and family online, members of the Moroccan diaspora community experienced what can be described as virtual togetherness (Germann Molz 2012, 70). Numerous research participants sustained social relationships with locals in their neighborhoods and at work. At the same time, staying connected with family members back in Morocco was a further pattern of their daily routines. Through the screens of their smart phones, many research participants got in touch with their family members during work breaks, on the bus, and in their homes after work. In doing so, they influenced members of their families. Moroccan expats, who often stayed in Istanbul for a predetermined period of time, had to make the choice to leave their close community behind, but remotely continued to engage in the education of their children and the provision of emotional support for other members of their family. A 28-year-old employee of an architectural office reported how her digital device was filled with sociality:

> Thanks to my phone, I can actually keep in touch with my family. When I have time I respond. Otherwise… I am not all day in front of the screen, but during certain times I check and if my father or mother have called. When I have a bit of time, I call them back. Luckily, there is the internet.

By staying in touch with friends and relatives living in Morocco, she created a life-world in which her lived experience and sense of togetherness were also constructed in digital environments. The instantaneous character of communication on participatory media facilitated this type of social existence.

A further means of engaging in virtual mobility and promoting the circulation of vernacular discourses is administering a blog. By writing blog entries, a web user can keep in continuous touch with a dispersed community while on the move (Germann Molz 2012, 5). In addition to personal interactions in physical environments, such as face-to-face discussions at work, or perhaps interactions at checkouts in supermarkets, members of the Moroccan diaspora community under investigation consistently participated in digital storytelling both as authors and readers. They could access photographs and vernacular stories about geographically distant events. A blog of a Moroccan expat residing in Istanbul epitomizes how vernacular discourses could reach a potentially global audience. Picture and word, seeing and telling, narratives and photographs are intrinsically linked on blogs. Audiences are often invited to see authentic and unfiltered experiences through the eyes of the blogger. MumInCasa.com, The Tribulations of a Moroccan family expatriated to Istanbul, is a blog written by a Moroccan national who moved from Casablanca to Turkey. This blog is a digital diary, primarily on her experiences in Istanbul. At least five entries explicitly addressed her

relocation to and stay in Istanbul. Six months after her move to Istanbul, she reflected in a blog entry on her life in the megacity. The following passage of her blog exemplifies how virtual togetherness works within her transnational networks:

> I didn't think that I was able to relocate with my family to a country where nobody speaks French nor English. Never would I have thought that I was brave enough to leave the comfort of my life in Casablanca behind. Never would I have thought to say goodbye to all my dear ones, when they asked me, if we would see each other again. Never would I have believed that I would leave... with two children. Today, I reside in Istanbul. My life changed in the space of a few days. I will tell more about it on this blog...

The author encouraged her readership to follow her entries. The most popular narratives of the blog elicited comments from up to seven readers. Although there is no official visitor count on the blog, thousands of endorsements on social networking platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, indicate its influence. The interactivity on the blog and its connectedness with social networking sites created a virtual togetherness between the blogger and her audience. On the thread of the Facebook account of MumInCasa.com a snippet of a new entry of the blog, in which she assigned meaning to a holiday trip to Morocco, was posted in July 2015:

> 10 days in Morocco.
> In the beginning, it was like wearing contact lenses inside out. Everything is the same but blurred. Everything is the same but at the same time different... (URL of the blog entry is inserted.)

This post illustrates the dissemination strategy pursued by the author. Although blogs are stand-alone websites, the circulation of their content depends to a large extent on their interconnectedness with popular social networking sites. Participatory media are often part of multifarious experiences as users share hyperlinks to further network locations. Semi-public messages on social networking sites can direct audiences to further network locations and interlink different platforms. MumInCasa.com variously promoted her vernacular blog content on social networking sites. Numerous people living in Morocco and elsewhere commented on her posts on social networking sites, which indicates how this virtual community unfolded. The possibility of 'following' a remote friend in digital environments generated an intersubjective togetherness between people living far away from one another.

After an extensive analysis of observation records and interview transcripts two main patterns of virtual mobility could be identified. First, the continued acquisition of participatory media literacy opened up new ways of experiencing friends and relatives within the affordances of digital environments. Digital devices evolved into sites of sociality where togetherness can be meaningfully experienced. Second, digital practices of interconnecting various network locations enhanced the circulation of vernacular content, including storytelling, video and photo sharing. Access to digital devices reshaped the ways social relationships were maintained among members

of the Moroccan diaspora. Embracing virtual mobility, they integrated a system of participatory media into their everyday lives. In doing so, they constantly sustained contacts with remote persons and generated a togetherness at a distance (Germann Molz 2012, 2). The blog MumInCasa.com came to life in a social configuration that mainly consisted of the transnational networks of members of the Moroccan diaspora and their participatory media. The ubiquitous use of participatory media among members of the Moroccan diaspora community considerably transformed their life-worlds. Their focus of attention shifted constantly between digital and physical environments as they mediated their lives between virtual togetherness and local involvement. Although they were anchored locally, an important part of their social lives evolved in online environments where they communicated with remote family members and friends. Mobile devices facilitated the switching between local and digital worlds, since they quickly connected their users to the web, regardless of their location.

Conclusion

Exploring a Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul in depth, this study sought to more comprehensively understand digital communication processes within contemporary diasporas. Numerous members of the Moroccan diaspora community under study have recently improved their participatory media literacy to configure network locations and create born-digital materials. In addition, a large number of Moroccan residents of Istanbul extensively used participatory media to create and maintain local networks with fellow Moroccan citizens. Many members of the Moroccan diaspora community also experienced perpetual contacts with friends and family living in Morocco or elsewhere through social networking sites and blogs. Their lives thus unfolded between two forms of sociality. While they became involved in local events in Istanbul, simultaneously they developed a sense of virtual togetherness with kith and kin in Morocco.

The evidence from long-term fieldwork in digital and physical localities frequented by the Moroccan diaspora community under investigation suggests that the widespread use of participatory media among its members generated a new realm of lived experience in their life-worlds. In other words, the use of participatory media created a new field of being, where they made sense of their lives and social relationships. Prior to emigration, their life-worlds primarily consisted of physical environments in which they mainly interacted with members within their local networks. Their engagement with participatory media remained relatively low. Upon arrival in Istanbul, many research participants increased their digital engagement and were driven by two often conflicting desires. Having left Morocco in the hope of a better life in Istanbul, they sought to establish local networks in the Turkish metropolis to increase access to professional and educational opportunities. Furthermore, they wished to remain in touch with their family and friends left behind. For these reasons, their lives existed between local involvement and virtual togetherness. Having one eye on local events in Istanbul and the other one on online updates from their distant friends and relatives,

they gained lived experiences in both physical and digital environments. The physical world constituted one realm of lived experience, and continued interactions in digital environments generated a second realm of lived experience. The digital world emerged as an additional field of being in their life-worlds. As participatory media enable the circulation of vernacular discourses, their users can experience meaningful stories and interactions with other users. Through such first-hand involvement, users gain lived experience and personal knowledge of the world. A digital field of being can develop its own dynamics and reach a certain degree of autonomy, increasing the agency of its users.

The case of the Moroccan diaspora community in Istanbul confirms previous research emphasizing that the web serves as a vehicle for free expression. The blog MumInCasa.com indicates that participatory media reinforce the free circulation of vernacular discourses among members of the Moroccan diaspora. Digital environments increase the access to manifold sources of information. The outcomes of this inquiry, however, call into question clear-cut distinctions between experiences in physical settings and digital experiences. The evidence from the case of the Moroccan diaspora rather indicates that the lived experience of its members is constituted by interactions in both physical and digital worlds. Despite long-term fieldwork and the collection of a comprehensive data set, the findings of this study are limited by its local focus and choice of platforms. This qualitative study reveals some patterns of participatory media use, but other stories could be told about further network locations and diaspora engagement in other cities.

The findings of this investigation imply that the conditions of experiencing the world were considerably changed in the early 21st century. The emergence of a new realm of lived experience among research participants makes a rethinking of theories of experience necessary. The instantaneous character of digital communication generates new forms of immediate experience and first-hand involvement. Everyday experience is no longer restricted to physical settings. Various forms of digital experience and intersubjectivity have 'real' consequences. Although participatory media content often refers to events unfolding in physical settings, digital entities take on their own lives and provide new avenues for experiencing culture and sociality. Ethnographic researchers should take the structural transformations of life-worlds into account when formulating epistemological assumptions and crafting methodologies. Future investigations into the use of participatory media within present-day diasporas can more intensively assess the underlying social processes of contemporary lived experience within the digital-physical continuum, portray the global diversity of participatory media use in diaspora communities, and explore the qualities and contours of lived experiences that originates in the digital world.

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"Keep Smiling!":
Time, Functionality and Intimacy in Spotify's Featured Playlists

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Abstract
As one of the world's largest online music providers, the streaming service Spotify has a profound capacity to shape everyday realities through digital technology. This article explores how both openness and control are embedded in Spotify's ways of delivering recommended playlists to users. After analyzing over 500 pre-designed playlists, we argue that Spotify's music recommendations evoke individual freedoms and flexibilities, at the same time as they prescribe normative temporalities, neoliberal subjectivities, functional approaches to music, and monetizations of intimacy. Such tensions between freedom and control speak of the dual inheritance of the digital and its potential to both liberate and constrain human action.

Introduction

Digital technologies are often said to have transformed music distribution and music consumption, making music "intangible" (Styvén 2007), and shifting focus from product and ownership to practice and access (Johansson 2013; Barr 2013). In the wake of this development, a wide range of digital music services have been launched, and today the Swedish streaming service Spotify stands out as one of the most well-known providers of digital music. Founded in 2006 as a service that promised user-initiated and search-centered access to vast amounts of sounds, Spotify has later come to re-organize its platform towards providing music recommendations and curated musical deliveries. The company is now frequently voicing a desire to provide "music for every moment", and offers a wide range of pre-packaged playlists that promise everything from "Smooth Mornings" and "Workday Zen", to "The Cure for Loneliness" and "A Confidence Boost". As one business representative put it in May 2015, Spotify has become "obsessed with figuring out how to bring music into every part of your life, wherever you are, whatever you're doing, whatever your mood" (Spotify Press Release 2015).

In June 2017, Spotify claimed to have about 140 million active users, and as people increasingly turn to streaming platforms, there is a need for a deepened understanding of the realities these services promote and materialize. Rather than neutrally channeling sounds, platforms such as Spotify take an active role in framing music, which includes the promotion of certain values and subjectivities. Like digital technologies in general,

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streaming music services simultaneously draw on a vision of free and unlimited access, and on regulatory practices that select and privilege certain content, collect user metrics, and deploy algorithmic ways of organizing information (Cheney-Lippold 2011). Such shifts between openness and control have surrounded Internet technologies since the very beginning. Associated with democracy, participation and emancipatory values on the one hand (Shirky 2008; cf. Turner 2006), and authoritarian control and surveillance on the other (Morozov 2011; Fuchs et al 2012), digital platforms occupy a contested position in today's media landscape.

In this article, we set out to investigate how these dual logics of freedom and commercial-institutional power are played out through Spotify's music recommendations. More specifically, we focus on one moment in the "social life" (Appadurai 1986)[1] of streamed music files by studying how Spotify's so-called Featured Playlists are presented to users in three different countries during one week's time. At the time of the writing of this article, Featured Playlists were selections of 12 readymade, curated lists of songs delivered to users upon login, together with a short greeting—such as "Kick start this Tuesday!" or "Enjoy time with friends and family". These are designed to cater to the expected everyday life of Spotify's users and depend on three broad variables: users' registered language, country and date/time.[2]

Occupying a central place in Spotify's new strategy for delivering music, Featured Playlists are fascinating entities that map and provide musical context (Seaver 2015, 2012)—both in the sense of creating an affective aura around sounds, and in the sense of approximating listener behaviors and preferences. Acknowledging that such contextualizations are always socially constructed and linked to interpretation (Dilley 2002), we approach Spotify's framing of playlists as an activity whose politics needs to be explored. Following Lev Manovich's (2001) call to study how software interfaces organize data in particular ways and hence "privilege particular models of the world and the human subject", we therefore ask: In what ways are musical contexts constructed through Featured Playlists and how are they entangled with the expected everyday life of users? What ideals, assumptions and subjectivities are (re)produced in Spotify's organization and presentation of music? And how are such elements tied to the dual logics of freedom and regulation?

In answering these questions, we focus on three aspects which we view as central to the way music is contextualized in Featured Playlists: temporality, functionality and intimacy. Whereas the Spotify platform builds on a logic of user participation, flexibility and freedom of choice—meaning that people are always given the option to rearrange, select and ignore any playlist—our argument is that the specific contextualizations of Spotify's readymade playlists are suggestive of neoliberal or radical individualist ideologies. In particular, we claim that Spotify's promotion of prescriptive temporalities, its presentation of music as functional for productivity and well-being, and its structures for producing and monetizing intimate expressions exemplify how systems that provide freedom and flexibility for the individual user, might also be bound up with "productive constraint" (Stanfill 2015) and market-driven attempts to monitor and regulate audiences.

Spotify and the provision of "free music"

Spotify was founded in 2006, and has rapidly grown to become one of the world's largest streaming services for music. Streaming services commonly give users access to archives of content—often film, music, or books—either for free (on an advertisement based platform) or against a subscription fee (which removes advertisements). In many ways, Spotify pioneered this way of distributing music, and its business model was originally celebrated for building a "sustainable" revenue model for artists in the digital age. The company early on presented itself as a user-initiated and search-centered platform offering free access to vast amount of sounds (Fleischer 2015). Its initial major feature—an empty search box—was described as a gateway to endless possibilities of musical pleasure, and a portal promising unrestrained access to millions of tracks. In this way, Spotify quickly came to associate itself with the progressive and liberating visions of digital technologies (e.g. Barbrook & Cameron 2007; Turner 2006). Entangled in notions of democracy, openness, and freedom of choice, Spotify branded itself as the antidote to online piracy and a platform giving fans relief from the immorality of illicit file-sharing activities. In part, the company's capacity to do so, needs to be understood in relation to the medium specificity of its service. Because of its digital grounding and organization, the Spotify platform embodies many of the open characteristics of new media. Music items from its archive can be singled out, shuffled, and reassembled according to the user's wishes and needs (cf. Manovich 2001), which opens up for different types of participatory media use (Jenkins 2005 [1992]), and the kinds of freedoms and flexibilities that are often associated with digital platforms.

Structured playlists and content recommendations

Around the year of 2013, however, Spotify reorganized its platform to focus more on music recommendations and curated music deliveries, and less on encouraging "free" botanizations among musical works. In part, such a turn took place as the result of critique against the platform leaving its users without guidance (Dredge 2013a). If the company had initially built its corporate image around the user's capacity to bend a giant musical archive according to their own wishes, customers were now instead portrayed as being bereft of truly pleasurable musical experiences, and therefore in dire need for a "fix" in the shape of musical guidance. Spotify's curatorial turn implied that the company simultaneously formulated a problem (musical disorientation, and a lack of musical enjoyment), and its solution (music recommendations), thereby tapping into "solutionist" discourses aimed to offer universal relief from distress by technical means (Morozov 2013).

To a large extent, Spotify's new role as a provider of tailored musical experiences has come to center on the delivery of pre-designed playlists—that is, themed collections of songs that users can enjoy and save in their private music collections on the Spotify platform. Like lists in general, Spotify's playlists are devices for taste-making, but also entities that carry a "dynamic capacity… to be both open and closed, to suggest both action and the ordering of action" (Phillips 2012, 97). As Phillips has put it, (play)lists

are simultaneously fixations, aesthetic objects and theatrical pieces; they are "at once endless… and restrictive" (ibid., 104). While playlists can be transformed, extended, and edited according to the user's wishes, they come in a pre-packaged format that transports affectual ideals, notions of "the good life," and conceptions of time (and time well spent).[3]

In this article, we are particularly interested in exploring how Spotify's Featured Playlists (which are non-personalized) take shape in relation to discourses of personalization on the platform.[4] This focus on the non-personalized implies going in another direction than much recent research on online recommendation systems, which has mostly focused on algorithmic dimensions of content curation, and how algorithms foster certain personalized cultures (Hallinan & Striphas 2014; Galloway 2006), networks (Ananny 2016), humanities (Berry 2011), identities (Cheney-Lippold 2011), ideologies (Mager 2012), publics (Crawford 2015), performativities (Introna 2016), accountabilities (Neyland 2016), and forms of governance (Ziewitz 2015). While Spotify's Featured Playlists partly come about by way of algorithmic data management,[5] we emphasize instead the humanly curated and descriptive texts and images that frame them. These musical wrappings are central to the process of turning digital, abstract and coded music into attractive goods and something that resembles physical commodities (Morris 2011). They are also fundamental for the ways in which music becomes entangled with ideas about everyday life, since playlist descriptions actively invoke different subject positions and notions about how, when, and by whom certain sounds could (or perhaps should) be enjoyed. Rather than discussing the implications of algorithmic music recommendations, then, we focus on how such collections are presented and framed—which we believe can be traced through playlist descriptions and the greetings that surround them.

Collecting playlists: Methods and materials

Methodologically, our study is inspired by Taina Bucher's (2012) "technographic" approach, where technography refers to an interpretative-descriptive account of software that makes use of ethnographic methods to understand the life-worlds that technologies generate. This method puts technology itself in focus—rather than the people who use it—asking what "software can be said to be suggestive of, and which underlying assumptions, norms, and values are embedded in the technologies used in everyday life" (Bucher 2012, 71).[6] Importantly, this is not to say that user practices are determined by software and interface design; users can of course listen to a playlist without caring about how it is framed, or choose to find music in other ways. The point, however, is that software produces certain norms through the actions it allows and encourages, and users will have to negotiate these norms in one way or another.

For the purpose of technographically studying Featured Playlists, we created three Spotify user accounts that would allow us to make observations and collect information on the kinds of content shown to each user.[7] Besides the short greetings that meet users upon login to Spotify, we were interested in playlist titles, cover images, and playlist descriptions, and in monitoring their change over time. The user accounts had identical

settings: they were registered on the same day, and were listed as 25-year-old females. Because we wanted to explore and compare content delivered in different countries, they were respectively assigned a Swedish, an American and an Argentinean identity. The selection of nationalities was limited by the actual countries in which Spotify is available, and motivated by an interest in exploring data from different continents. Furthermore, Spanish, Swedish and English languages are known to us, thereby facilitating the analytic process.

With the technical assistance of Roger Mähler and Fredrik Palm at Humlab, Umeå University, we used an automatic script to log into each account once every hour during one week's time, starting at 8 am on September 1 and ending at 7 am on September 9, 2015. After logging in, we documented the presented greetings and recommended playlists, and signed out again. This process was repeated every hour, starting at 8 am on September 1 and ending at 7 am on September 9, 2015. In total, empirical data was collected on 168 different occasions during the course of this week. The data consisted of 142 unique greetings (the Argentinean user received 42 different greetings, the American user 52 and the Swedish user 48). We were further recommended 542 different playlists (the Argentinean user received 117 unique playlist recommendations, the American 213, and the Swedish user 212). Noteworthy is the fact that on average, 72% of the greetings were repeated more than once. In a similar way, 91% of the playlists were delivered on multiple occasions during the week.

The collected material—images and texts translated to English—was coded using qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti. This software facilitates organization and categorization of unstructured empirical data and offers functions for search and retrieval as well as for visualization of co-occurring categories. Building on a thematic approach, we analyzed the material in terms of both form and manifest and semantic content. More specifically, greetings, playlist titles, playlist descriptions and playlist covers were categorized according to content, weekday, time of day, musical genre, and mode of address. In this way, three main patterns of music contextualization began to emerge, as we further outline below.

The temporality of playlist recommendations

In his classic work *Hidden Rhythms*, Eviatar Zerubavel (1981) identifies four major forms of prescriptive temporal regularities: rigid sequential structures (i.e. in what order events take place), fixed durations (how long events last), standard temporal locations (when events take place), and rates of recurrence (how often events happen). All of these prescriptive temporalities can be seen in how the Spotify client sequentially structured how the day and the week was organized; how each playlist recommendation had a more or less fixed duration and temporal location; and how many recommendations seemed to recur with regular intervals. Time, then, was a key element affecting the delivery of music on the Spotify platform. And importantly, time is not a neutral category. Instead, we understand the temporality of playlist recommendations as suggestive of a patterning of social life with strongly normative effects as regards how time is supposed to be spent. While the selection of presented

playlists changed repeatedly—between six and nine times each day—for the sake of simplicity, we suggest the circulation of recommendations can be seen to structure the day in three broad phases: mornings, afternoons, and nights.

Spotify Mornings

Mornings were, quite expectedly, defined by the Spotify client as the start of the day, when it is time to get out of bed, have breakfast, and go to work. "Welcome to a brand new week!" we were greeted early on a Monday, and on Thursday we were urged to "Wake up to good vibes". The playlists accompanying such greetings explicitly related to the time of the day, with titles such as "Sunny Side Up", "Songs to Sing in the Shower", and "Wake Up and Smell the Coffee". Many of the playlists presented on weekday mornings also revolved around work and commute—such as when we were encouraged to "Make it to work the right way". Several of these work-related playlists were illustrated by imagery showing indoor, office-like environments. Hence, they primarily portrayed work as a postindustrial, white-collar activity.

During weekends, the circadian rhythm slightly shifted: according to the content of messages and playlists, evenings lasted longer on Fridays and Saturdays. Hence, Saturday and Sunday mornings also began later and were typically described as lazier than weekday mornings. During this time of the week, work was not mentioned at all, and emphasis was instead put on sociability, recreation, and "chill-out." Furthermore, certain moods and activities appeared to be particularly distinctive for weekend mornings. For instance, Spotify delivered a number of "Hangover Friendly" playlists on Saturday and Sunday.

Spotify Afternoons

As the days proceeded, new activities were brought to the fore by the client. Afternoons generally exhibited a wide range of activities but overall, users seemed expected to feel less energetic at this time of day, with Spotify promising to deliver an "Afternoon energy boost, coming right up!", or rhetorically asking "A bit slow during the afternoon?". Here, the most commonly occurring themes centered around work and concentration, presenting playlists such as "Keep Calm and Focus", "Intense Studying" or "Work Work Work." Music related to exercise and physical performance also tended to appear during afternoons, as we were greeted with playlists like "Adrenaline Workout" and "Hard Exercise". This was similar on weekends, when we were expected to engage in different kinds of exercise, although always combined with "indulging in lazy afternoons", or enjoying "a long Sunday dinner".

After 4 pm, weekdays were typically associated with commuting, returning home and winding down. Playlists such as "Evening Commute", "Long Way Home", and "Relax & Unwind" speak to this theme, as well as exclamations like "How nice it is to get home and enjoy Home Sweet Home!". Weekends were somewhat different in this respect, as they were clearly favored above weekdays and often characterized in more celebratory ways. On Friday afternoon, for example, Spotify in the three countries cheerfully called out: "Happy Friday with V of Viva la Vida!", "Let the weekend begin!" and "Feel the Friday fever!"

Spotify Nights

When afternoon turned into evening, Spotify encouraged us to chill out. Obviously, the time after 6 pm was meant for time on the couch listening to playlists such as "Autumn Evening" or "Cozy Time at Home." Evenings also appeared to be the proper time for sociality, for instance in the form of dancing (especially in the Argentinean context), or in the form of relaxed dinners which, according to Spotify, are "an important part of the day". The significance of mealtimes—also as a social event—was further emphasized in many playlist descriptions. This included relations with friends, family and romantic partners, as suggested in titles like "Dinner Romance" or playlist descriptions claiming to provide "Encouraging pop for you and your friends in the kitchen". Weekend nights—typically espoused by the client—were in addition characterized by a focus on partying, as we encountered playlists like "Party to go" or "Cocktails & Dreams."

After 11 pm, the Spotify client appeared to think it was time to sleep, at least on weekdays. Nighttime playlists were mainly devoted to help users unwind, as demonstrated in titles insisting on sleep: "Sleepify", "Sleep Tight" and "Jazz For Sleep". However, weekend nights seemed to stretch much longer, as users were encouraged to "shake their booties" and "dance until sunrise". Another significant activity, only mentioned at night, had to do with sex. One playlist, for example, prompted us to "Get cozy and make time for some kissing and cuddling!" In the same vein, other playlists urged us to "Close the door… and turn off the light" or boldly asked "Getting laid?".

Featured Playlists as Regulated Temporalities

As indicated above, Featured Playlists organize music recommendations according to specific rhythms—indeed, they jointly create their own micro temporalities. Spotify's regular shifts between different sets of playlists can thus be seen as a form of dayparting bearing similarity to how the day is divided in traditional broadcast programming (Ellis 2000; Spedale et al 2014). However, in contrast to dayparting and more in line with the logics of social media, we argue that Featured Playlists contribute to the construction of "realtimeness"—that is, an experience of certain modes of content delivery, whose "new" and "updated" feel supports open and participatory notions of digital technologies. Weltevrede et al (2014) explain that "the notion of real-time… is used to describe media characterized by fresh, dynamic or continuously processed content", and stress the need to understand 'real-time' as a market device and a social construction. Hence, they write that "[m]edia do not operate in real-time, devices and their cultures operate as *pacers of real-time*," (ibid., 127, our emphasis).

The specific ways in which realtimeness is produced through Featured Playlists includes not only the everyday rhythms demonstrated above, but also references to seasonal changes and current events, such as the Pride parade and the death of a popular Argentinean musician. Such timely playlist deliveries can be seen as an attempt by Spotify to embed itself in the everyday lives of its users and uphold an image of being constantly up to date. However, as previously mentioned, it turned out that 72% of the greetings and 91% of the playlists were actually repeated more than

once during the course of our one-week data collection. Moreover, the Argentinean user received several greetings that declared "August has never sounded better", although the month was in fact September. These time lags, we argue, are excellent examples of how realtimeness is a precarious construction which may be undermined and contested by instances of delay.

Furthermore, we suggest that the ways in which realtimeness is produced through Featured Playlists reproduce 'chrononormative' assumptions related to everyday life. Freeman (2010, 3) uses the notion of chrononormativity to describe prescriptive temporalities, and more specifically "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity". She defines "temporal mechanisms" as those social and political processes that reproduce time-related norms of work, health, citizenship and family life. Such temporal regulations—expressed in the form of life course expectations—must be adhered to so that one's embodied existence becomes socially meaningful from the point of view of capitalist and heteronormative ideologies. In our case, Spotify's chrononormative effects were most evident in how the different dayparts did not only privilege certain updated musical content, but also included the explicit designation of activities and moods to different time slots. Together with the personal and imperative user address, this served to embed strongly prescriptive temporalities into the platform.

Music as a means: The functionality of playlists

Streaming platforms, according to Paul Allen Anderson (2015, 811), increasingly work to create musical moodscapes for their users in which music recommendations can be understood as "products for affect management and mood elevation". In our study, this could be seen in how music was promoted not only as an aesthetic object but as a performative one. Although playlist descriptions typically included brief characterizations of the music genre they contained, more than half of our collected items pointed to a presumed function of the particular playlist. In this section, we will look closer into this issue of "functional" music. More specifically, we suggest that Featured Playlists, through their emphasis on music as a means, may serve as a disciplinary technology that promotes neoliberal subjectivities and attitudes.[8]

Significant for playlist descriptions invoking this view of music was their reference to what users can achieve by listening to a particular list. The type of achievements—or the everyday areas in which music was suggested to be of help—largely corresponded to the main "genre categories" found on Spotify: workout, party, focus, chill, sleep, travel, dinner and romance. For instance, we were offered energy boosts so as to perform better when exercising, prompts for heightening our productivity at work, or repeated suggestions to use music for increased focus and concentration; Spotify recommended "rock to help you relax and concentrate", and "Epic All-Nighters" that would help us "power through" our night time studies. Music was generally described as performative of motivation and energy—regardless of whether it had to do with dancing, getting up in the morning, or getting in the mood for partying. In part, this disciplining towards heightened performance and productivity was

dependent on time regulation; hence, this too can be seen as contributing to the politics of chrononormativity, where playlists served as promises of time-bound, idealized lifestyles.

This is not the first time that music has been treated as a functional device for the purpose of increasing productivity. Much research has for example focused on the use of music in the workplace in order to increase efficiency (see Prichard, Korczynski & Elmes 2007). As Jones (2005, 724) has shown, there is a long tradition of using music as a means to "impact upon worker output" rather than appreciating it for its "aesthetic or artistic 'value'". Others have pointed to how workplace music upholds order in post-Fordist, capitalist societies (Jones & Schumacher 1992) or, conversely, how music consumption is a dialectical cultural practice through which workers can partly express their resistance to a routinized and alienating structure (Korczynski 2011).

We concur with the latter perspective in acknowledging that Spotify users can make sense of music in their own ways and may also freely choose between differently themed playlists. At the same time, however, we want to stress that we were repeatedly invited to view music consumption as an accompaniment to other, more significant tasks, rather than as an activity in its own right. The goal, here, was not only increased productivity but also a general improvement of one's mental state and attitude to life, something seen in playlist descriptions like, "Get happy with this pick-me-up playlist full of feel good songs!", "Stay focused and smart with these house tracks", and "Nothing hurts as heartbreak. These songs will help you have a good cry."

By providing such sketches or maps of emotional states, Spotify creates a certain type of mood environment for its users. For Anderson (2015, 838), musical mood environments "point toward a fantasy of intentional and while-you-wait mood treatments and manipulations, as if moods could be put on and shed as easily as winter hats and mittens". In line with Anderson's view, Spotify's Featured Playlists can be seen to educate users on how to classify themselves according to their temper. At the same time, the playlists also encourage treating cognitive and emotional states as garments which can be pulled out of a closet, tried on, and easily be put back again. The delivery of playlists thereby serves to guide users toward particular treatments of their mental lives.

However, based on our specific study, we argue that Featured Playlists do not primarily encourage the exploration of or cycling between a wide range of moods in the way Anderson (2015) has proposed. Instead, Spotify's promotion of music as functional primarily privileged a subject determined to strive toward well-being. This was evident in the many calls to use music for personal improvement, and in greetings and playlist descriptions such as "Conquer your morning", "Like a boss" and "You're on top of the world. Don't forget it." The positioning of the user as a boss, a potential conqueror, or someone on top of the world, we argue, is clearly connected to the notion of music as contributing to enhanced performance. These and other examples illustrate how Featured Playlists promote a type of subjectivity informed by positive thinking as a contemporary ideology (Ehrenreich 2009), and the related investments in unattainable fantasies of "the good life" that subjects are propelled into by neoliberal

society (Berlant 2011). There were indeed a few examples in the material showing how playlists can offer accompaniment to the dark sides of life, such as when the Featured Playlists sympathetically claimed to want to "reduce insomnia and anxiety", or provide music to cure "Morning Melancholia". Even here, however, focus tended to be on overcoming hardships by listening to the right playlist. In this respect, Featured Playlists not only push users towards increased productivity, but also privilege a mode of entrepreneurial subjectivity in which users are encouraged to direct their desire for change inwards and "relate to themselves as if they were a business, are active, embrace risks, capably manage difficulties and hide injuries" (Scharff 2016, 108).

Intimacy and its monetization

Intimacy has always been mediated in the sense that emotions and personal relations have frequently been filtered through objects, literature, sound, images and technologies (Hjorth and Lim 2012). In this section, we focus on Spotify's ways of producing and mediating intimacies and establishing (or approximating) personal connections to users. Here, intimacy is primarily produced through discursive modes of address, and we argue that Spotify's language use may be understood as an attempt to establish close relations and turn them into monetary value.

As seen in the previous sections, the presentation of Featured Playlists often addresses users in a highly personal tone. Spotify frequently promotes collections of sounds by using imperative moods, by posing questions, or by invoking an explicit "you". Thus, we were met with seemingly personal greetings like "What's for dinner tonight?", or playlist descriptions humbly asking "Trouble sleeping?". While these questions are open for multiple answers and interpretations, they are clearly also suggestive of specific scenarios. In particular, by hailing a "you" and bringing up topics that in many other contexts would be seen as belonging to the private sphere, the client suggests a close and cordial relationship to the user(s) which in turn may produce a sense of intimacy on the platform.

Despite this personal address (and unlike much other content on the Spotify platform), Featured Playlists are not personalized but mass broadcasted elements which depend on country, time, and date. On one level, modes of address that approximate personal relationships and interactions have been part of mass-media communication for a long time (Durham Peters 2010; Horton & Wohl 2006 [1956]). Such discursive strategies may for example be found in TV shows or radio broadcasts, and as Horton & Wohl (2006 [1956]) noted already in the 1950s, intimate speech in these contexts has traditionally worked to simulate a sense of participation and belonging, despite the fact that communication is often one-sided. Horton and Wohl argue that intimate speech serves to establish guidelines for audience behavior, since intimate language creates a sense of sympathy, sociability and friendship, and thereby constructs audiences who behave in a similar way (even though this might certainly backfire and create detachment and rebelliousness). Spotify's personal tone of language may thus be understood as adopting classic rhetorical strategies of mass media in order to pave way for friendly attitudes amongst its audiences.

The intimate speech that surrounds playlists also borrows from other earlier media formats that have circulated within private spheres. In particular, playlists have much in common with the intimate, eclectic tropes of mixtapes, that is, analogue cassette tapes filled with self-recorded music, which were commonly circulated amongst friends in the pre-digital era. As Drew (2005) has pointed out, the positive and emotive associations of mixtapes have frequently been picked up by creators of commercial music mixes, who capitalize off of their personal and homemade feel—and the same could be said of playlists. By being structured and named in ways that are akin to personally crafted music collections, playlists borrow their aura—a process which can be seen as a kind of appropriation of non-commercial social relations and practices of sharing amongst music fans.

Most importantly, however, Spotify's attempts to produce and mobilize different modes of intimacy need to be understood as part of larger market logics, and in particular the company's ways of gaining ad-based revenue. Rather than solely guiding and catering to the needs of listeners, playlists occupy a central role in Spotify's strategy to attract advertisers and thereby keep the free—and advertisement-based—version of the service afloat. At the time of data collection, Spotify offered advertisers the possibility of reaching users according to at least eight different activities and moods that are found in playlists, such as: workout, party, chill, focus, dinner, kids & family, travel and romance.[9] In this way, Featured Playlists serve as preparations for behavioral marketing—an advertising strategy aimed at segmenting audiences based on their conduct, emotional states and personality traits (Connolly 2015; Peterson 2015). This targeting ensures that advertisements can be sent out to particular clients at particular points in time, based on what music they are listening to. Spotify thereby makes it possible to broadcast health and fitness ads to someone who is listening to a workout playlist, or food oriented ads to someone who is listening to a dinner playlist, for example. Through such processes, Featured Playlists become embedded in larger strategies for creating ever-more granular market divisions of audiences.

One way of understanding these strategies of turning playlists into objects for consumer segmentation, is to view them as expressions of how "public display and mediation of personal emotion and affect" becomes linked to monetary value (Hearn 2010, 429). As the Spotify machinery gears more towards the provision of playlists that evoke intimate moods, the service becomes (financially) dependent on users' willingness to disclose their feelings by selecting a playlist that suits them. Here, we might again think about the functional, mood-oriented playlists that urged us to "get happy", "stay focused" and "have a good cry". On the one hand, the act of providing playlists that speak to a user's private life is in itself constitutive of intimacy; on the other, intimacy is also produced and monetized as users are expected to share their activities and emotional states by selecting preferred playlists.

Concluding remarks

This article has investigated how the dual logics of freedom and accessibility on the one hand, and commercial-institutional power on the other, are played out through

Spotify's music recommendations. In many ways, Spotify is a service that allows for greater audience agency than earlier forms of music delivery. By providing access to a seemingly infinite archive of songs, Spotify invites its users to freely pick and choose, save, and rearrange music according to their individual preferences. In terms of promoting its business, reminding users of this flexibility has also been a central strategy for Spotify. As the story goes, the platform grew out of a desire to envision a different future for music distribution, where non-piracy as well as users' preferences, creativity, and imagination, would guide how music is consumed. In many ways, then, Spotify is a service that seems to embody the open characteristics of new media. Judging from the popularity of Spotify and similar streaming services, such possibilities for individual choice are also perceived as attractive and highly valued by users.

However, as demonstrated in this article, flexibility and freedom for individual Spotify users is—in a wider perspective—also bound up with control and disciplining of audiences. We have argued that such regulatory effects are primarily produced in three ways: through specific organizations of time, through the promotion of music as a means, and through connecting intimate patterns of listening with revenue through ad sales. By drawing on prescriptive temporalities in the packaging of playlists, Spotify suggests chrononormative organizations of everyday life that privilege some lifestyles over others; for example, attending to social relations in the evenings, engaging in intensive and white-collar labor during the day, and upkeeping a romantic life at night time. These normative ideas of everyday life are further advocated in the promotion of music not only as an aesthetic object but a functional tool for entrepreneurial subjects who strive to lead better, happier, and more productive lives. Further, the framings of playlists serve to produce a sense of intimacy that, in turn, generates revenue for the service. The connection between playlists and advertising strategies, reveals how capitalist logics merge with (both real and imagined) mundane life and personal spheres.

In this sense, we argue that the musical contexts discovered in this study—in terms of temporality, functionality and intimacy—point to how the Spotify client is driven by market logics and tends to promote neoliberal or radical individualist ideologies. Featured Playlists, it seems, may work to discipline audiences and (re) produce particular subjectivities as well as normative ideas about "the good life". While Spotify's playlist deliveries open up free spaces for music exploration and subversion, they can thereby also be read as expressions of institutional-commercial power that users need to relate to—in one way or another.

Notes

1 Following Appadurai's call to analyze "the social life of things", means we recognize that our study can only grasp a momentary slice of the cultural biographies of streamed music.

2 See https://developer.spotify.com/web-api/get-list-featured-playlists/ (retrieved 3 January, 2018).

3 Importantly, such packagings build on a much longer history of structured music deliver-

ies that compile and frame music according to pre-established notions of taste, listening and pleasure. Some of the most relevant precedents to playlist deliveries might be found in classic jukebox technologies (Attali 2009 [1985]), radio broadcasts (Tacchi 1998), cassette tapes (Skågeby 2011; Drew 2005), and compilation albums (Wikström & Burnett 2009).

4 By personalization, we refer to the ways in which users' behaviors on a platform come to underlie the content that is presented to them.

5 In an interview from 2013, a chief product officer at Spotify described how their playlists "draws on three 'pillars' using data from a subscriber's friends, personalised recommendations and real music experts" (Warman 2013). Spotify's playlists can thereby be described as a result of the joint labor of human music editors (who describe, label, and put music in context), users (whose everyday activities and social networks are monitored and analyzed), and algorithms (whose labor consists in sifting through large amounts of data, and sketching out connections between sounds).

6 Hence, our study says nothing about how playlists are actually experienced or put to use by Spotify listeners (for such accounts, see e.g. Nylund Hagen 2015; Werner & Johansson 2016).

7 With the public interest in mind, we appreciate Spotify's forbearance with any trespassings of the user agreement that this data collection involved.

8 While the performative power of music was a major theme in the material as a whole, the extent to which it was referred to differed slightly between the three countries: it was most common in the Swedish material, and a little less so in the American and Argentinean data.

9 See https://www.spotify.com/us/brands/targeting/ (retrieved 3 January, 2018).

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The Dyophysite Nature of the Internet:
Negotiating Authorities within Institutionalized Christianity

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Abstract
Is the internet a means for individual empowerment and collective upheaval against oppressive powers, or is it a tool to monitor and control people in the hands of authoritarian rulers? This article addresses the "dyophysite" or what can be called the double nature of internet. That is a dualism that goes back to the origin of internet with its roots simultaneously in American West coast counterculture and the cold war militarism of the 1960s. Within the Christian community, this dualism plays out as the internet is viewed in a paradoxical matter. Even as cyberspace equips evangelicals to connect with other believers, it can introduce Christians to pagan ideas, tempting misbehavior and destructive communities.

Introduction

Is the internet a means for individual empowerment and collective upheaval against oppressive powers, or is it a tool to monitor and control people in the hands of authoritarian rulers? This article addresses what can be called the double nature of the internet. That is a dualism that goes back to the origin of internet with its roots simultaneously in American West coast counterculture and the cold war militarism of the 1960s (Turner 2006). It seems to be a question that cannot be solved. It is almost a religious question; similar to the question about the nature of Christ. Is He purely divine, or is He human, or both? As with the internet, it is commonly accepted within both the Catholic and Protestant traditions that His nature is dual or "diophysite." Understanding the diophysite nature of the divine has been a source of discussion and division over the years. To be diophysite is not to be either divine or human, but, as the answers (in a theological sense) often have been, it is to be somewhere in between.

Within the Christian community, the internet is viewed in a rather paradoxical matter. It spans from those who see the internet as an opportunity to reach out and communicate with people, to a source to temptations, misconduct, or a waste of precious time. As Quentin J. Schultze puts it, "The medium [the internet] is a two-edged sword", and he continues, "largely because of its highly interactive, decentralized character as a networked rather than a mass medium, the Internet implicitly persuades in both directions, from faith and doubt, doubt to faith - and everything in between. Even as cyberspace equips evangelicals to connect with other believers, it can introduce Christians to pagan ideas, tempting misbehavior and destructive communities. [...] In other words, cyberspace is a kind of laboratory for individuals and groups to experiment with self-identities" (Schultze 2008, 142). This quotation encapsulates

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the ambiguity toward the internet within the religious sphere and its representatives, which this article will discuss.

Centered on four case studies that are based within the institutionalized Christian sphere, this article aims at pointing out, emphasizing, and discussing the double nature of internet. Its focus is on what is considered to be an ongoing negotiating process in relation to institutional power and the anti-hierarchical participatory culture of internet—two entities not fully align with each other. The four cases are selected to mirror some of the diversity one finds within Christianity (even though limited given the broad variety). It is also important to point to how uses, attitudes and effects of the use of internet is contextual, and should not be seen as determined by the media itself.

Authority is one main issue within the growing field of digital religion (Campbell 2012; Cheong 2012; Cheong & Ess 2012), and an illustrative example where the double character of internet is highlighted. The twofold nature of internet shines through also in every day practices, which here will be dealt with through a synthesis of the four case studies regarding the negotiating of authority within churches. Those are: 1) A live streamed American televangelist scrutinized on Twitter by a Swedish online audience, 2) the twitter account of the (fake) Archbishop of the Church of Sweden, 3) virtual churches in Second Life, and 4) the use of internet within a conservative and technology skeptical Swedish Christian denomination.

It is important to notice and interpret how internet as medium both undermine and strengthen power structures—and to see how other factors also come into play. People with their competences and sociocultural positions, societal and economic circumstances, and so on, give a framework for how the internet contributes to the negotiation of authority. Ideological or preconceived assumptions blur our understanding of what the internet and a digitized society do to us. An empirically grounded interpretation of the role of the internet helps us to better understand contemporary society on both an individual and collective level, and how technology might, or might not, influence society, and social movements related to politics, religion, economy, and beyond.

In the different cases, we will note how new actors are heard, actors who question existing authority, but at the very same time it is noted how these voices are intertwined in existing structures. The internet is an arena where authority is contested and negotiated by both existing and new structures. The internet is also used as a means to contest authority. But as soon as established structures are undermined new ones tend to arise based upon other premises such as media expertise and offline positions.

Cyberspace, hybridity and the mediated Church

Throughout history a relation between media usage and changing power relations can be detected (cf Eisenstein 1980; Kittler 1999; Winston 1998). When it comes to the Christian Church, it has to a large extent been in control over media through history, while attempts to undermine the official message has also been mediated in different ways. Religion and media is thus not possible to separate (see for example Horsfield

2015 for an overview, or Stolow 2005). There is, for example, a correlation between the 16th century Lutheran Reformation and the printing press, between the 19th century Evangelical Awakening and the industrial printing press, and the raise of Mega churches and television. The printing press undermined Church structures in the process of the Reformation. Luther and other reformers printed their work and distributed their subversive message in opposition to the Catholic Church, and the preachers of the Awakening distributed their pamphlets outside the established (national) churches. New actors have challenged, today and throughout history, the monopolistic role of the Church and its priesthood. At the same time, we see how new and contemporary media play a role through challenging old structures while promoting and building new institutions. Today, digital media are a tool and a platform which function as a platform for negotiating power structures.

As shortly pointed out in the introduction, the internet has a dual background that is rooted in both the fear of Cold war missile attacks and the 1960s counter culture of the US west coast. Networked computer communication would secure bombproof communication in case of warfare. Simultaneously internet technology was seen as an anti-hierarchical and anti-authoritarian technology promising tools for individual freedom and even spiritual enhancement (Turner 2006). Military needs and counter culture ideals worked hand in hand in other words. In the early days of the internet, the technology was perceived by its pop cultural proponents as a separate entity as in the case, for example, of William Gibson's influential conception of "cyberspace" in Neuromancer (Gibson 1984). In the 1980s Gibson envisioned cyberspace as a parallel (virtual) reality that individuals connected to and then experienced a new reality with another set of rules that were completely different from actual reality (Hogan, Bernie & Wellman, Barry 2012).

While "cyberspace" was seen as a mode of reality with other sets of rules where traditional authority was subverted and individual freedom flourished, today online authority is perceived rather as tangled with, and related to, offline authority. There are however examples of how the internet has both strengthen and undermined established power structures. As mentioned above, digital media and what is referred to as social media have been seen playing a role in the popular upheaval in the Middle East. The revolutions in Tunis and Egypt in 2011 are popularly labelled the "Twitter revolution", and the 2009 election protests in Iran are referred to as the "Facebook revolution". The role of social media in these processes was important, but in both cases it became clear afterwards that other significant factors came into play as well. (cf Howard & Hussain 2011; Pfeffer & Carley 2012)

On the one hand, the internet and digital media have for example been part giving voice to the previously unheard, but on the other hand the internet has been a tool for mass surveillance on both a national and global scale, as shown by the Snowden affair, or in the hands of a capitalist market. Digital media is shut down in states under oppressive rule and used to track dissents; the very same ones who uses the subversive side of the internet. At the same time, states, governments, law enforcement and business agencies strengthen control through the capacity to engage

in mass surveillance. Individual representatives, both already established and non-established, can strengthen and secure their influential position through the use of digital media. (cf Lyon, 2007; Morozov, 2012) Similarly the role of digital media, and the digitization of society, is transforming for example the field of public debate, how marketing is done, and the traditional and authoritative role of journalists, teachers and doctors, just to mention a few areas (cf Hayes, Singer, & Ceppos 2007; Loader & Mercea 2012; Metzger & Flanagin 2008). The answer to the question regarding the nature of the Internet is that it is neither nor, or both, but probably something in between—depending on context.

In early 2000, Manuel Castells claimed that digital media differed from traditional media since it was a many-to-many medium and hence undermining established hierarchical structures in one-to-many media, and he was not the first or the only one making such ideologically colored predictions (Castells 2003; see also Jenkins 2006; Rheingold 2002). The use of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs and similar, has indeed challenged traditional authority, and is a means to negotiate authority. Today anyone (with skills, an internet connection and a computer) can post a blog or a Facebook update, contribute to Wikipedia (and participate in building the world's largest and most dynamic encyclopedia), or collaboratively make open source software, to name just a few possibilities.

Our view and understanding of cyberspace has changed. Now we see virtual reality as intertwined with physical reality. Instead of two separate sets of rules or ways of being, it is spoken about as an inseparable hybrid, mixed reality, or a "third space" with interaction in between. (Hoover & Echchaibi 2012; Lindgren 2013) The role between online and offline, between authority and the anti-hierarchical, the official and the vernacular is blurred and must be considered as rather complex relations. (cf Cocq, 2015; Hindman 2008; Howard 2008) The emergence and the extended use of these concepts in contemporary research in relation to interpreting the use and effect of the internet, indicates how the understanding of the internet as a phenomenon has become more nuanced over the years. Early assumptions about a border-crossing and separate "cyberspace" has been replaced by assumptions emphasizing hybridity and duality (compare with Højsgaard & Warburg (2005) regarding the development within the field of digital religion).

Digital media plays a role in relation to how authority and structures are reoriented and negotiated. In the following, there will be examples of how authority is negotiated in relation to the implementation of digital media in an institutionalized Christian setting, suggesting one needs to take into account other contextual factors than media itself.

Authority Online

Early research within the field labeled as "digital religion" reflects previous notions about how "cyberspace" challenges existing rules and authorities in an almost deterministic way. Still, there are just a few focused studies over the years based upon empirical evidence, but the number is growing and studies are becoming gradually

more nuanced.

When speaking about authority one almost needs to go back to Max Weber, one of the founding fathers of the discipline of Sociology. According to him there are three categories of authority (Weber 1962): First there is "rational-legal authority", which is based upon the rules and principles written down in constitutions, laws and regulations within the framework of the national state, or maintained through formal merits. Secondly there is "traditional authority", which is passed down from master to apprentice, through generations, by habits or customs with a continuity throughout time. Thirdly, charismatic authority is based upon the charisma of the leader/authority—that is, an authority derived from a "higher purpose" mediated through the representative of the power. In addition, "professional authority" is sometimes mentioned in this context to refer to authority that is given through expertise and professionalism within a given field. Modern society is, to a large extent, founded upon rational-legal authority, while more traditional societies rests upon traditional authority (which goes without saying). Depending on denomination and traditions, churches have, speaking in general terms, a mix of rational-legal, traditional and charismatic authority. As can be seen in the difference between the role and position of, for an example, a priest within a Catholic tradition and a preacher within the Pentecostal movement. There is a difference in legitimacy and authority based upon established systems for authority in the case of the priest and on charisma in the case of the preacher.

When Mathieu O'Neil studied authority online, in different collaborative online projects he highlighted the fourth characterization, "professional authority," as a new component in online collaborative environments (O'Neil 2009). In projects such as the online encyclopedia Wikipedia or large open source projects as the operative system Linux or the software package Debian, O'Neil claimed that in such large collaborative projects expertise and professionalism are the ground for authority. Merits according to an established education system, tradition, or charisma do not matter. What is important is the work carried out. Results and how individuals function in the system is the most important, and if participants show professionalism and skills, they rise in prominence and hierarchy. These individuals have an over-arching understanding of the project and the technical skills give power to include or exclude persons, skills or code. One should not assume these projects are un- or anti-hierarchical. These projects are indeed hierarchical, but founded on other form of hierarchies and authority.

We can see how the internet is a platform for negotiating church authority, where formal merits, legal-rational authority, and even charismatic authority are challenged by those who have expertise within other fields—such as computer skills, information and communication technology competence, or abilities from the area of public relations or public information (Cheong, Huang, & Poon 2011). At the same time, professional expertise is not enough as the following cases will highlight.

Authority Negotiated—Four Case Studies

The following studies show the diversity regarding the use of digital media within

the institutionalized Christian sphere, and also show how media is used in different "branches" of the Christian Church. The first case, "The American Televangelist" deals with the use of social media within and in relation to a charismatic Protestant free church. The second study, "The tweeting (fake) Archbishop" deals with how digital media is used in the negotiating process regarding authority within the Church of Sweden, a former state church. The third case, "To construct a (virtual) Church", highlights an environment where there are no constraints regarding established structures, and how media is used to build new structures, but at the same time reflects old structures. And finally, the fourth study, on "A technology resistant church", deals with how one movement deliberately and with great awareness restricts their use of digital media, and how structures restrain their use of digital media.

An American Televangelist scrutinized in real time

The first case deals with the American healer and televangelist Benny Hinn and his visit to Uppsala, Sweden, the summer of 2010 (Gelfgren 2013). He is, according to some, a controversial person surrounded by financial issues, fake healings, an unorthodox theology, a divorce, and an alleged love affair, among other things. His proponents, on the other hand see him as God's anointed tool.

As soon as the Swedish charismatic denomination "Word of Life" (Livets Ord) announced Hinn's appearance at the so called Europe Conference (an annual meeting for the denomination, Europakonferensen in Swedish), discussions took off in social media. His status was discussed as well as whether or not it was appropriate to invite him given his controversial position. In blog posts, Facebook updates and on Twitter this was discussed from different angles. Weeks before the actual event the Word of Life announced the official hashtag, #ek10 (as in EuropaKonferensen 2010), for the event. A couple of weeks before the event an alternative hashtag, #hinn10, emerged on Twitter, with the purpose to discuss Benny Hinn and his appearance. There were three meetings during one weekend, and they were all livestreamed via Word of Life's web platform, so anyone with a computer and the link to the stream could follow what was going on in Uppsala. The first meeting was rather uncontroversial with some unorthodox theology expressed during the service, and the online discussion on Twitter was rather moderate. For the next meeting people geared up behind their screens and anticipated something more elaborate to happen. In the ongoing #hinn-discussion there was a mix of people including journalists (from the Christian press), preachers/clergy, a mentalist, a Word of Life defector, some proponents for the Word of Life, and other interested people. On a forum for the Swedish secularist movement there was a call to join forces to look at, and scrutinize, what was going on, so there were a few secularists as well.

Throughout the event, Hinn's acting, healing and preaching was studied and commented on live. Theologians discussed his theology, the mentalist studied his healing tricks and how the whole set up was constructed, the defector commented the Word of Life and the mentality in general, the secularists commented how disturbing the whole event was, and so on. The few proponents were pretty much

in the background of the conversation. The hashtag trended on Twitter and after a while other curious spectators jumped in. The discussion was rather critical about the whole event, and official representatives for the event never intervened in the discussion. After the second service, the Word of Life's pastor and founder, and an old friend of Hinn, Ulf Ekman, took the stage and explained that the audience had to reflect upon the message and what we had all experienced. Later, he also commented on the event on his blog and video blog. These posts got a lot of comments and were spread through different social media channels. Ekman, however, never engaged in any discussion. This choice indicates a rather elaborate awareness of how to handle media, according to media strategy guidelines (cf Coombs 2007).

This event shows how technology both opens up previously closed events, and how such openness gives the possibility for others, with different competences and standing points, to see and scrutinize what is going on.

The Fake Archbishop

In the summer of 2012, during the Olympic Games in London, the Archbishop of the (former state) Church of Sweden suddenly started tweeting (Gelfgren 2015). Only hours after his appearance, his choice to begin tweeting was greeted by enthusiasm and encouragement. Many expressed hope for a new openness from the Church and a new dialogue-friendly mentality. His group of Twitter followers grew steadily. Within 24 hours after the first tweet, however, the Archbishop's office responded via Twitter, saying that this new Archbishop's twitter-account was a fake, and that someone was impersonating him. Twitter Inc. was contacted and the account was closed down because, in accordance with Twitter's regulations, to "impersonate others through the Twitter service in a manner that is intended to or does mislead, confuse, or deceive others" violates the user agreement ("The Twitter Rules," n.d.) Just before the account was closed down, the person behind it declared s-/he intended to hand over the account to the Archbishop at a ceremony, and it would thereafter be free to use in any way the Archbishop wanted.

Soon after the closing of the account, a discussion emerged on Twitter with the rather humorous hashtag #biskopsriot (humorous since it was not much of a riot to talk about). The discussion focused on the Church, social media, and openness—and whether or not the Church was apt, prepared and adjusted to the new society internet just brought. People discussing the subject agreed, to a large extent, that the Church was not prepared for this "new paradigm" (as one twitterer put it). The discussion was rather harsh and did not turn out in favor of the Church. Instead, the Church was characterized as outdated and out of contact with contemporary society as well as the people it is supposed to serve. Only a few voices defended how the Church had responded to the fraud, and those voices represented mainly the Archbishop's office. A few weeks later the person behind this venture revealed his identity in public, through the Church's own newspaper, expressing his aims and motivation. He was working as an information officer for the Church of Sweden in a local parish. The aim was to highlight the use of social media for the Church, to stir a discussion on the issue, and

to push the Church into the direction to start using social media to a larger degree.

To some extent the hoax did pay off. There was a discussion in favor of the use of social media within the Church—on Twitter and blogs, in the Christian press, and it was even mentioned in news media. But if one looks at the people active in the discussion, arguing for a more social media-active Church one notices that these actors are not coming from the traditional structure within the Church. Most of them are involved in the work of the Church—some of them are working for the Church, and some of them as active members—but within information or information technology. By knowing how to "spin" the web and to use his position as an information officer, he could get attention, and thus bring the use of social media to the agenda, supported by people outside established power structures. On one hand, we see how digital media is used to undermine established structures but on the other hand structures in place can resist and act against such initiatives.

To Construct (a virtual) Church

The next case concerns Churches and other Christian places in the virtual world of Second Life (SL) (Gelfgren 2014). Second Life is an open computer generated 3D world. Users access this world by downloading software, through which they enter the world. Each user is represented by a so-called avatar—a digital representation of the individual. Users can rent land to create landscapes, create buildings, garments and other goods, to use themselves or to sell to others. In SL people live and socialize in various forms, similar to "ordinary" life, and while SL resembles a computer game there is no game engine (meaning there is no game narrative or goals to achieve).

In a study on how Christian places are constructed in SL approximately 120 places for Christian worship, socialization and amusement were found. (Gelfgren & Hutchings 2014) At focus were how they could be classified in terms of tradition or transformation, realism or innovation. Many of them are build and run upon personal and non-institutional initiatives. The places looked differently—some were built to look like medieval villages, others had a modern urban setting, some were constructed as exotic islands, while others had more imaginative landscapes. It is possible for anyone to construct any kind of environment, but it was noticed that as many as seven out of ten places (71%) had erected a traditional church building, with easily recognizable attributes as stained glass, alter, pulpit and pews. At most places with a church, the church was only one part of the place, with other areas for socializing (camp fires, rings of cushions or sofas, dance floors, and so on), amusements (games, fishing spots, roller coasters, etcetera), and lodging (huts, houses, cells, or apartments to rent for shorter or longer says). One out of ten places had a more imaginative structure than a traditional church to fulfill religious functions, and a few more places did not have a church at all, but, instead, used the landscape itself as the context for religious practices and beliefs.

A follow up study, based upon questionnaires and interviews, focused on the constructors of these places. It sought to understand who they were and their motivation and aim for constructing their Christian sites. The study also examined

how the constructors and their different places related to offline churches, different church traditions, and to change. They usually wanted to create a space balanced somewhere between the offline institutional and the online mediated and more personally oriented. On one hand the constructors wanted something well known, but on the other hand they strove for the new, inclusive and subversive in relation to the churches they knew from the physical world.

The study found that most constructors had an offline religious affiliation (85%), and that their affiliation was reflected in the environment they created online. As constructors, they had responsibilities including preaching and caring obligations online, but most of them did not have such a position offline. Their motivation for going online was often that they wanted to do something slightly different compared to what was done in the offline world, or they wanted to be a Church and a Christian meeting place in the virtual world in similar ways as in the physical world. (cf Hutchings 2010) Many emphasized the openness and tolerance in Second Life, and that SL gave them possibilities to meet and reach out to other people online compared to their offline church. Some of the constructors went online since they experienced intolerance and a too narrow framework in their offline context. Even though rather traditional forms for worship were common, the constructors greeted the possibilities to socialize among fellow believers from all over the world. In that way, they expanded and negotiated the concept of being a Church and practicing their religious faith.

So while most constructors and owners were part of an offline congregation or other Christian context, they had other roles in Second Life, and while their places resembled offline churches, they wanted to create places slightly different from the places they knew from the physical world.

A Technology Hesitant Church

The fourth case deals with the use of digital media within the Laestadian denomination—a Swedish conservative Christian denomination, conservative in both terms of theology, family values and technology. (Gelfgren, 2017) This confessional revivalist movement dates back to the early 19th century, and grew out a critique of the former Swedish state church (The Church of Sweden). The founder Lars-Levi Laestadius (1800–1861) emphasized, through his alleged colorful preaching, the need of conversion to Christ, a moral and modest life, and the need of the conventicle (the small group of believers) within the Church of Sweden. Originally the Laestadian movement had its stronghold in the northern part of Sweden (within the Sapmi area) and in Finland, but today the movement has spread over Scandinavia, to USA, and other countries too.

This case focused on why the use of information technology seemed quite restricted, and differs in that aspect from the three previously mentioned studies. Authority is still a matter of how digital media is used. This study was made through "scanning" and mapping the web for online activities and web presence and then conducting semi-structured interviews with a selected number of representatives for the movement.

After the death of Laestadius the movement split into three different branches,

with slightly different orientations that grew out of controversies around the turn of the century 1900. When looking at the web presence for the different branches and congregations, it is striking how static the web pages are. Some congregations, especially within the most conservative branch, have only one contact page, others have their own webpages. There is, in general, contact information and how to get to their meetings, an schedule for ongoing and upcoming activities, and some overall information about the congregation, its' activities and faith. Some of the pages have links to other pages within the movement and other resources such as Bible and Hymnbook apps for Android and Apple smartphones. There are no social media at all, which is usually found at other sites connected to churches and denomination—there are no blogs, Facebook groups, Twitter accounts, or Instagram pictures. Hence, there are no possibilities to interact with or within the congregation on the official webpages.

Individual use of digital media within the movement was not addressed in the study. However, in the interviews it was mentioned that people within the movement use social media, even though the outspoken aim was to have a low use since it interfered on the more important aspects of life, such as spending time with your "real" family and friends in the physical world. One representative said that "we use digital media when it is better than other means of communication." Representatives expressed the sense that it is not possible or favorable to build social relations over internet. For them, important relations happen, and can only happened in the physical world. Accordingly, the message of God cannot be distributed online. Digital media is not rejected per se, and tools like email, Skype, Dropbox, Google Drive, search engines, and the internet in general are used frequently—but mainly for professional or administrative work. The internet is seen on the one hand as a great, and maybe underused, tool for communication, but on the other hand as a means for tempting misbehavior, stealing time from more important aspects of life, and for opening exposing the movement to internet trolls (which has been the case in the past, according to the informants).

In contrast to the other cases where focus was on the "un-authorized" use of digital media, the different interviewed representatives here described the structure and the authority in the movement. In this case, the representatives expressed a consensus within the movement that it was possible for anyone who wanted to take initiatives to develop the use of the web and other digital tools. But if there is anything controversial, it would have to go through the official structure. They envision an increasing use of digital media with the coming generations and an even more media saturated society. In other words, the Laestadian movement is trying to balance, to find a middle way, between the advantages and disadvantages of internet communication and this quality of the movement actively relates to the double nature of internet.

How to Interpret the Diophysite Nature of the Internet

These four cases illustrate the dyophysite nature of the internet and digital media. The internet does neither undermine nor strengthen the institutional power of religious

authority. It can be either or, or both, at the same time depending on the preconceived opinions regarding for example history, faith and context. It is nevertheless noticeable how new groups of actors rise in prominence and interpretive power in these cases. Through being skilled within technology and information, rather than theology, information officers, computer aficionados and webmasters become more important from within the sphere of the Churches, and thereby undermine the established structures rather than pose an outside threat. On the other hand, representatives of institutional power, and institutions, can counteract these subversive powers, and try to keep their position—hence the negotiating process. There are some features to emphasize where the previous interpretative prerogative is negotiated.

For example, Heidi Campell proposes a fourstep model for interpreting the use and implementation of digital media within religious contexts (2010). She emphasizes the importance to take tradition and theology into consideration—which is an important for an understanding of how digital media are used and perceived within religious institutions. In traditions where the established structure is important such as in the Catholic Church or more Fundamentalist movements like the Laestadian, there is combination of legal-rational and traditional authority, to use Weberian terminology. In these cases, there is larger chance that the established framework might take counter actions against outside voices. If the theology, the religious beliefs and practices, are rooted in such structures, the questioning of those structures is not encouraged. In traditions like the Pentecostal movement or other revivalist and charismatic movements like the Word of Life movement, Charismatic authority is intertwined with the conventional structural authority and the constitution of the movement is rooted in an upheaval against structures. In these kinds of movements, charisma and reform occur to a larger extent in the open and thus become an accepted living condition within the movement.

New voices

In the first three abovementioned case studies, it is evident how new actors and voices are heard and become a part of the negotiating process. At the same time, it is obvious how established structures are in place which the new actors relate to and also have to be accounted for online. In the last case, the established structure claims that there is no immanent need to create any online presence and it seems to be in charge of the situation. As a result, new initiatives are scarce.

In the case of the American televangelist, several new voices are heard. One reason is the openness the livestream brings. This gives an opportunity for actors who would probably not attend a meeting with a healing pastor to get involved in such an event. With Twitter constituting the forum where it is discussed, a hundred and thirty-three different users tweeted with the #hinn10-tag (and several more were involved in blogs, blog-comments and Facebook posts). Many of them with only a few tweets, but still a large number for such a discussion—and most of them were critical of what they saw and heard.

When we look at the case of the Second Life-places, we note that there is at least

one person per place (approximately 120 persons) who would not be able to construct a church of their liking in the physical world. Their intention is to reach out to new groups of people, but also to do something different from what established churches offline do. Often tolerance and openness is emphasized in contrast to what they experience in their offline context.

In the discussion concerning the tweeting bishop, about 135 persons actively discussed how and to what extent the bishop and the Church in general and the Church of Sweden in particular should be more involved and present online. Once again, most participants tweeted just a few times and the majority of tweets are written by a minority of twitterers.

All in all in the three cases which involves actors outside the structures, about one hundred were involved in each case. New voices were evidently present and heard.

Who are Behind the New Voices?

Once we have established the fact that internet and digital media allow new voices to be heard, it is interesting to further dig into what kind of voices we hear. Who are they, from what position do they speak, and are they really new? The rhetoric surrounding online democracy claims that anyone can be heard, and all of us are equally important in the online world, with the same ability to come through in the public discussion—as if internet in itself undermines established authority. But such suggestions need to be nuanced. For example, when Mathew Hindman (Hindman 2008) discusses online democracy within the political sphere, he is quite skeptical of such general claims.

First of all, there is, by comparison, very little political content on the net, and most of that traffic in political content is concentrated to a few top sites. In addition, most voices heard in the political discussion come from a relatively homogenous group of people; belonging to a group of white men who are well educated and already established within politics and media. It is a difference between talking online and to having a presence online that is actually heard. There are thousands of political bloggers and commentators, but only a small fraction, an elite so to speak, generates a large amount of the traffic. Campbell has found similar patterns in the Christian blogosphere (Campbell 2010). Thereby it is a bit hollow to claim that the internet gives equal rights to everyone. Offline position, merit, status, and competences are still of importance. That is to say that legal-rational, traditional, and charismatic authority still powerfully operate.

Our four cases differ in character. Three are Swedish, one is global; three are about the abundant use of digital media, one about the restricted use—but still we can see a pattern of who the supposed new voices are. Let us look into the different cases. In the twitter discussions regarding Hinn and the Archbishop, the most active individuals in those discussions were those already active on Twitter. There were a hundred active twitterers, but, at a closer look, the most active, and the most re-tweeted actors were the already-established voices—among them two Twitter-active journalists (working within the Christian press), a pastor, a mentalist, communication officers from the Church organization, a social media expert, a Word of Life dissent (and an active social

media user), and the PR manager of Word of Life. There were other voices involved indeed, but they were not as active, and they did not receive the same attention in terms of re-tweets or mentions. The most re-tweeted accounts belonged to two journalists well known from Twitter and the Christian press. Among the top 10 twitterers in the #ek10-network, we also find a figure central in the (online) Swedish secularist network. What is worth note in a discussion of online democracy and empowerment, is that he and the other secularists involved in the discussion formulated their own, detached network, meaning that they were present in the discussion, but they discussed, mentioned, and re-tweeted, among themselves and with like-minded others.

When we consider interests and profession, which we get access to through the twitter-biographies, questionnaires, and interviews, we also see a pattern. There is an over representation of people working with media, communication and information and communication technologies. This might not be a surprising fact, but it is nevertheless important to note in a discussion regarding who the alleged new voices belong to. In the discussion about the tweeting bishop, there was a clear bias toward being critical about the restricted use of social media within the Church of Sweden. When we consider those involved, we note that actors who think it is of the utmost importance for their Church to be active in social media tend to work with communication within the Church or have other similar interests. Fifteen out of the top 20 twitterers describe themselves as working in communication and, among the same 20 twitterers, thirteen work with communication within the Church of Sweden. There were, however, very few involved in the discussion who belong to the traditional structure of the Church, such as the clergy or theologians. Apart from three actors working at the bishop's office, arguing against the hoax, there were only a couple of others representing the established structure. Only two persons from the top 20 cohort seem to have no particular interest in communication or working within the Church, but had a narrow interest in how the Church communicates in general and through social media in particular.

In the Laestadian case, all seven informants belonged to the established structure as representatives for the movement. Church affiliation was also already mentioned in the #ek10 and the #biskopsriot cases. Most people involved in this discussion were Christians and were involved in established churches and denominations apart from those who came from the secularist movement and those who "popped by" after #hinn10 trended on Twitter. In the Second Life case, where there are actual statistics in this matter, only 15% stated they have no church affiliation outside SL. About 74% said that their place is affiliated with a specific church tradition, and 80% stated that it is the same as their offline affiliation (this question had however the lowest answering frequency).

There is also a gender aspect to these cases. In the Benny Hinn-case, a majority (eight out of the top ten) were men. In the case of tweeting bishop there is a slight majority of men, 12 out of the top 20. Among the constructors of Christian places in Second Life, there was not such a big majority of men, but still a male majority. Among the Laestadians, all the informants were male. Without doing a thorough examination

of the age span of the active actors one can conclude that most voices belong to people between approximately 30 to 50 years—meaning that the young and the old were not represented. In the Second Life-study, 65% stated they are between 41-60 years of age and only 2% were between 21-30 years of age.

In short, people involved in these endeavors are mostly middle-aged males, who work with or have an explicit interest in information and/or communication technology, and they have an affiliation with established church structures. We also see other groups and actors, raising concerns, questioning structures, adding alternative voices, and thereby undermining a likeminded and monopolistic discussion in line with established structures, but they are not as dominant and active.

Negotiating Authority—Through Online Competence AND Offline Position

Through the abovementioned cases, the duality, or even complexity, of the internet is emphasized in terms of authority. These four disparate studies show: 1) the difficulty of finding generalizable patterns specific for online environments, and 2) there are ongoing negotiations of religious authority in virtual communities to which digital media contributes itself. This possibly seems to be a paradox, but it only shows how the issue is not a black or white matter. A nuanced discussion is needed in order to comprehend what digital media do, and have the potential to do, in terms of authority and its supporting structures. Instead of a landslide toward one side or another, it is a matter of nuances and balancing. It is difficult to claim that one side is in favor of the other, and to come to a verdict—to say that the nature and implications of digital media is either this or that. As previously shown in this article, these findings are in line with the dual origin of the internet—as both rooted in the militarism and the counter-culture of the 60s.

The Laestadian case differs from the others in that there are, according to the interviewed representatives, no tensions between different interests regarding the use of the internet and where the authority lies. Traditions are still strong and the structures in place support established authority. However, the informants can see changes coming even though they are not sought for or really desirable. With young people growing up our contemporary media saturated society, there will probably follow a changing attitude and use of digital media within the otherwise conservative movement. Still they can partly resist and restrict the use of digital media within the movement—both on an official level and on a private level through teachings and doctrines. Traditional authority, still resides, so to speak.

In the three other cases, it is easier to see how digital media constitutes a platform and an arena where established power structures within the traditional church institutions are contested. On the other hand, we can see how "new" actors use established structures offline to legitimize their voice. In the Second Life case, new places are created with clear resemblance to old established physical churches, and the places are built in line with existing practices and patterns in denominations and churches. The reason is that it is a church, and therefore they build a church (an easily

recognizable structure for people), and it is primarily used as a church. By connecting the virtual structures with known structures, the builders make the online activities seem legitimate and trustworthy.

In the cases related to Benny Hinn and the tweeting fake archbishop, we have noted how new voices are involved in the discussions. In both cases we do however see how most voices belong to actors already established within media or in the church structure who are working with information and public relations. It goes without saying that in social media it is important to know how to handle media and thus how to reach out to a broader audience. That fact explains why journalists and information officers are so often heard in these online examples. Proponents for the established structures of Church of Sweden (in the #biskopsriot case) and the Word of Life (in the Benny Hinn case) are questioned by these critical voices. These voices, however, are also quite scarce and remain more in the background during the discussions.

In the cases overall, we see how the lowest common denominator among those who act for a new order in relation to established authorities is predominately based upon legal-rational and traditional authority. They are that they are skilled in handling information and communication technologies in one way or another. They use established structures to be assertive against the structures they want to question. In the Second Life case for example, churches (as buildings and institutions) are used to legitimize the activities in the virtual world; in both the #Hinn10 and the #biskopsriot cases actors are given legitimacy through their position within the press or the church.

Having expertise or a high level of knowledge about media is both a basis for challenging established structures. Further, individuals argue that as more people have more expertise in media that change will continue to occur. In the bishop case, actors skilled in information argue for a more media active church. From their point of view as media experts, this makes sense. The Laestadian representatives think change will come with the more media-active younger generation after the old generation has lost their grip over contemporary media practices. In Second Life, we see how the owners and constructors of the places use new forms of technology to bend the rules and boundaries of the established church. In the Hinn case, journalists and other media-active proponents are the main activists.

In order to question and undermine the ruling authority, we see how critical voices are raised by actors with authoritative position in areas outside the traditional Christian power structure—but it is just not anybody who is randomly given a voice. Authority is a complex phenomenon, but probably not as categorizable in three types as Weber suggests. However, the combination of an authoritative position in Weber's three-sided typology, being an expert on digital media, and being an avid user of digital media, all give individuals the potential power to challenge, diversify, and hence undermine the institutional framework by adding more voices. "New" authority is not given to, or taken by, those who have a total lack of power (online or offline). Instead, is redistributed among those already in power. Therefore, going back to the original discussion concerning the diophysite nature of internet, it is not possible to

claim that the internet deterministically does either support or undermine structures in place. The internet does, in these cases, neither. Instead, it is a tool to support the rearrangements of power structures in the hands of already media-skilled actors.

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Traditional knowledge—New experts

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Abstract
The dualism of the internet, with an ideology of individual freedom and hopes for empowerment on the one hand and logics that contribute to a consolidation of power on the other, is reiterated in contemporary digital practices and discourses. The internet is an arena where power structures—both institutional and non-institutional—meet and intertwine with one another. In this article, I discuss how expertise and authorities are shaped and (re)defined online based on recent examples of Sámi initiatives for the revitalization of endangered languages and for knowledge production. The recent increased use of digital practices implies that new experts and authorities emerge, challenging and bypassing institutional structures.

Traditional knowledge—New experts

The internet and other digital and mobile technologies are often perceived as democratizing due to their availability, interactivity, low cost, and ease of use. The web indeed encourages participation and enables more people to collectively engage in the opening of public debate in the political, social, and cultural spheres (Papacharissi 2004; Benkler 2006). It has also become easier for internet users to create their own tools, apps, websites, etc. In this context, the number of digital resources to strengthen the Sámi languages has grown considerably in recent years (Cocq 2016a; Cocq 2013; Cocq 2015; Cocq 2016b).

Previous research has discussed the impact that this alleged democratization entails. Rainie and Wellman write, for example, that the democratization of media participation "enables a new breed of media creators to step onto the cultural stage. This reshuffles the relationship between experts and amateurs and reconfigures the ways that people can exert influence in the world" (2012, 220). The so-called web 2.0 that has opened up opportunities to participate and influence can be seen from this perspective as a means to question and challenge structures and power relations and to assign the role of experts to new actors.

This positive attitude towards the internet and web 2.0 that Rainie and Wellman (2012) illustrate has been problematized and questioned by other researchers, and the potential of social media to enable marginalized voices to reach arenas that they otherwise would not have access to has been debated. As previous research (e.g. Sassen 2004) underscores, social media are not isolated from the social logic. Discourses of democratization nuance the effects of new media on the larger political debate (Hindman, 2008; O'Neil, 2014), and critical voices suggest that social media contributes to maintaining or even strengthening existing structures and power relations (Dean 2003; Fuchs 2010; Lovink 2005).

The dualism of the internet, with an ideology of individual freedom and hopes

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for empowerment on the one hand and logics that contribute to a consolidation of power on the other, is reiterated in contemporary digital practices and discourses. On the internet, power structures—both institutional and non-institutional—meet and intertwine with one another.

Here, I will discuss how expertise and authority are shaped and (re)defined online based on recent examples of Sámi initiatives. In order to provide a balanced picture of the potential that digital tools can have for Indigenous groups, this article examines a few examples of initiatives designed and implemented in order to strengthen the Sámi languages. The first one deals with a web resource and mobile application for beginners in Ume Sámi, one of the smallest Sámi languages that, until very recently, did not have an official orthography. The second example is an application that, through GPS-technology and augmented reality, recomposes a Sámi linguistic landscape. This is an illustration of how mobile technologies provide alternative modes of mapping and naming. The third example focuses on a language activism project that problematizes and questions relationships to Indigenous languages and language learning. These examples are the results of initiatives that took place outside traditional institutional frameworks, and they illustrate how digital and mobile technologies are used and applied with the intention of challenging, questioning, and/or revisiting attitudes towards Indigenous languages.

Digital practices are here approached in terms of intersection and interplay between online practices and what takes place offline—which is also true for the way I conduct my research, including collecting data. The examples in focus in this article were studied through digital ethnography supplemented with qualitative interviews with the project leaders behind the initiatives.

Contemporary challenges for the transmission of Indigenous knowledge

The Sámi are Indigenous people[1] of Europe. Sápmi, the traditional area of settlement, is a broad area that comprises the northernmost parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia. National borders, however, have political implications because language areas, modes of land use, etc., span across these borders. Despite the varieties of languages, the heterogeneity of livelihoods, and diverse conditions and prerequisites for cultural and linguistic vitality, the Sámi are one nation with a common flag, a common national song, and a common national day. The Sámi are thus one nation stretching over the nation states of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. In terms of politics, there are Sámi parliaments in Sweden, Norway and Finland, which are representative bodies subordinated the national parliaments of their country.

The Sámi languages are endangered, but efforts at revitalization can be witnessed in many areas in Sápmi. All Sámi speak the majority language in each country (i.e. Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, or Russian); however, not all Sámi speak or understand a Sámi language. In the colonial context of Fenno-Scandinavia, Sámi culture and languages have been marginalized. Efforts to counteract and question this invisibility and marginalization have multiplied in recent years—as will be illustrated here.

The population of Sápmi has been generally quick to adopt new technologies,

from the first generation of cell phones in the 1980s to the modern use of social media in domains as diverse as e-commerce, language acquisition, and activism. There is a high level of digital literacy in Sápmi—and a relatively good standard of internet accessibility as is the case in large parts of Sweden.

Formal education has proved to be deficient when it comes to the needs for Sámi language learning, including access to teachers and learning materials in Sámi, and this has been pointed out and criticized by the Council of Europe on several occasions since the ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages in 2000—a criticism that applies to Sweden, Norway, and Finland.

Impediments to implementing effective revitalization efforts within the Swedish education system are also brought out (Vinka 2015). Therefore, knowledge transmission has to be problematized: for Sámi speakers who wish to pass on their language to the younger generations, and for those who want to learn a Sámi language, modes of learning and teaching need to be supplemented outside educational institutions.

The fact that the institutional education system does not meet the criteria to enable effective knowledge transmission (Keskitalo, Määttä, and Uusiautti 2014) does not apply only to the revitalization of the Sámi languages. Several researchers problematize education and learning in Sámi contexts and highlight the need to develop a culturally based education model with more focus on cultural knowledge, including, for instance, elders as a resource and a source of knowledge, and based on Sámi ontology and epistemology (Nutti 2012; Owens et al. 2012; Hirvonen 2004; Pettersen 2006; Svonni 2015).

The availability of resources and the need for culturally based teaching courses vary between areas, schools, and students. In this context—where resources are uncertain regarding Sámi language training and education—community-based initiatives take place using online digital media and digital tools in order to counteract the mismatch between the needs of the community and what the schools can offer.

Conceptualizing authority in digital settings

How power and authority are shaped and negotiated online is often described in terms of complexity and messiness. The breadth and range of internet-based communication and information channels is one of the reasons why it is difficult to identify and explain how power is distributed online. Theoretical approaches to authority provide us with a framework that allows us to grasp the dynamics, effects, and implications of digital initiatives.

For instance, the concept of vernacular authority—in contrast to institutional authority—has been discussed comprehensively by Robert G. Howard (2005, 2008, 2011) who underscores the role of the articulation of tradition in discourses and the empowerment and disempowerment it implies (Howard 2013). Vernacular authority is a concept that allows us "to critically assess the role that elevated authority plays in the ideologies […] media users are constructing for themselves" (2013,76). This concept is relevant to the study of digital tools for Sámi languages because it highlights the importance, intentions, and effects that individual initiatives can have in a broader

context in which other experts, authorities, and power conditions exist.

Folklorist Diane Goldstein underscores how there has been "a vernacular turn", i.e. an "explosion of interest in the vernacular" (2015), and she gives examples of movements and situations that began in the 1990s and 2000s

> to change the relationships of ordinary people to experts and expert knowledge. Grassroots organizations, particularly in development, environmentalism, and health, began to combine ideas of lay expertise with activism in a new form of political participation and a new form of science. (2015,128)

Different forms of vernacular and institutional authority interact rather than stand in opposition to each other—for example, when official sources refer to folk traditions in order to gain legitimacy, or when institutions' and organizations' websites refer to or retrieve information from individuals, such as posts on social media (Cocq 2013).

Authority has also been approached in previous research from the perspective of digital democracy (see e.g. Dahlberg, 2011), a concept that refers to how different positions and attitudes take place online. The media can be seen as a tool for communication and for facilitating decision-making, but also as an arena for counter-positions and for questioning. Digital media are sometimes seen constitutively, "as bringing into being particular spaces, objects, and practices" (Dahlberg 2011, 865). Thanks to digital media, marginalized voices acquire the opportunity to be heard through online and offline activism, and social movements online are able to get organized, coordinate, and cooperate in a way that can bypass established institutions and structures.

Rainie and Wellman (2012) consider that the internet provides strong opportunities for empowerment:

> The role of experts and information gatekeepers can be radically altered as empowered amateurs and dissidents find new ways to raise their voices and challenge authority. (2012, 14)

In a similar manner as the notions of *author* and *original source* are questioned in internet research because they belong to an age "dominated and even defined by the cultural significance of print" (Sauerberg, 2011,2; see also McLuhan, 1962; Parland-von Essen, 2014), the notions of authority and expertise need to be reconsidered. In the digital age, these are not assigned through apparent controlled frames, and they are exercised under different premises today than they were during the period referred to by some scholars as the Gutenberg parenthesis (e.g. Sauerberg 2011).

This perspective describes the web as democratizing and as an arena where new voices emerge and potentials for change are greater than through traditional media. Whether these new voices reach out and actually challenge authority, however, is another question. Regardless of skepticism or faith in the internet, new technologies contribute to a new media ecology that affects not just the technology, but also communities. Kahn and Kellner (2008) observe that "the emergent information and

communication technologies are transformative in the direction of more participatory and democratic potentials" and that these allow "self-determination and control from below" (Kahn and Kellner, 33–34). This perspective is interesting to apply to the study of specific digital tools in order to further investigate whether and how new technologies can contribute to an increased degree of influence and a renegotiation of the distribution of authority when it comes to matters related to language and language learning.

Initiatives in digital environments need to be understood in relation to other factors such as the influence of popular and local movements as Goldstein mentions, as well as political and cultural processes in minority politics. The next section therefore contextualizes contemporary initiatives related to the Sámi languages and digital technology.

Alternative resources, reclaimed domains, and decolonizing strategies

In order to investigate how expertise and authority are shaped, negotiated, and redefined on the internet, three specific examples will be discussed here: a web-based language learning resource (also available as an app for mobile devices), an app that displays Sámi place names, and an art and activism project on Tumblr. These represent different efforts to strengthen the use and status of the Sámi languages and to support language learning.

Memrise - Umesamiska ord och fraser

> Because we have to deal with these problems – that is, a lack of teachers and resources along with the geographical distance between those who want to learn and those who have the knowledge – digital communication is the only solution, to me, that can make things happen. Oscar Sedholm, project developer, Såhkie (interview).

The first example is a course on Memrise, an online tool for language learning (web based and as an application for mobile devices). *Umesamiska ord och fraser* (Ume Sámi words and phrases) is a course in Ume Sámi for beginners. It was launched in 2014 by Såhkie, the Sámi Association of Umeå, in collaboration with Álgguogåhtie, the association "Ume Sámi [community members] in collaboration". This Memrise course was initiated by Oscar Sedholm, project developer at Såhkie in 2014, based on previously recorded material. The Ume Sámi language is one of the smallest of the Sámi languages[2]; there are few teachers, almost no teaching materials, and the range of courses is very small and sporadic.

The Memrise tool consists of a frame and a structure provided by the app developers, within which anyone can create a course and fill it with content. Course participants, i.e. those who use the app to learn Ume Sámi, register with a username. The Ume Sámi course on Memrise then follows a textbook structure. The user builds a vocabulary that begins with simple basic words, continues with word lists that follow different themes, and then progresses to simple sentences, questions, and phrases. A voice reads the words, and the beginner can practice both pronunciation and spelling.

The app is based on a form of gamification where the user receives points for every word that he/she practices and acquires. Everyone can follow their own progression through the score list, but they can also follow other users through a leaderboard of the most frequent users. Users receive a badge in pace with the learning process and are upgraded on a scale from "Membryo" to "Overlord". Memrise also contains a function to interact with other "Mempals", i.e. other users. In this way, the app can serve as a way to create, strengthen, and/or maintain a network and to make it easier for users to keep in touch with each other. At the beginning of 2016, the course had 185 registered users (individual accounts).

The course had a greater impact and spread than Oscar Sedholm had hoped for[3]. When he contacted the CEO of Memrise and British memory grandmaster Ed Cooke—it turned out that the company was very eager to participate in the project. Cooke and colleagues came from the United Kingdom to Umeå in December 2014 in order to meet Sámi community members, gather material, and further develop the application with videos. During the visit, the conference "Viessuojeh Mujttuo: A Digital Future for Ume Sámi" was organized. The conference and the *Umesamiska ord och fraser* initiative were covered by *The Guardian*[4].

Memrise – Umesamiska ord och fraser is the result of collaboration between different actors. The course is based on user-generated content within an existing structure (an application) created by an external actor. This is where local players contribute with information and knowledge and thus fill the provided structure with content. The local, non-profit organization Såhkie was the initiator of this resource based on needs and demands of the community. Part of the project developer's responsibility at Såhkie was to collect and make resources in and about the Sámi languages more widely accessible. Oscar Sedholm pointed out that in the case of Ume Sámi "there's not much you can link to. We had to create something ourselves."

The project developer mentioned that he is now looking for funding from various agencies in order to further develop Ume Sámi material for Memrise. Commenting on the relationship and dependency between the non-profit organizations and government agencies, he said:

> Municipalities as administration work in a certain manner – and that way of working does not work for Ume Sámi. [...] Because the very system is wrong, the work lands on the shoulders of the non-profit organizations.

In this context, it is worthwhile mentioning that Ume Sámi is not only one of the smallest Sámi languages; it is also a language that, until very recently[5], had no officially acknowledged orthography. The work with the Memrise course took place at a time when the spelling was under discussion and negotiation. *Memrise – Umesamiska ord och fraser* is not just an initiative outside national educational institutions; it is also shaped outside the official frame. The lack of an official orthography implied that the language itself was not recognized as a distinct language to the same extent as the other Sámi languages. While this could have been an impediment for printed material, the lack of an official orthography was not an issue in the production of the Memrise course.

iSikte Sápmi

> I hope that there will be more awareness about Sámi place names, that the names will be used more often, and that new groups will take them into use. Inger Persson, project developer for iSikte Sápmi (interview).

iSikte Sápmi is an application for mobile devices that reveals Sámi place names in the surrounding landscape via augmented reality. It was developed in 2012 by *Gáisi giellaguovddáš* (the Sámi language center in Tromsø, Norway) as the product of a documentation project and a database of place names. The official description of the app reads:

> What is the name of the mountain you can see in the distance? What are the lakes you see in front of you? Point there with In Sight – Sámiland and you'll see on the screen what they are called. In Sight – Sámiland shows Sámi POIs [points of interest] in Norway. See what's near you when you travel in Sámiland: mountains, lakes, places, buildings, etc.[6]

The application connects a database to a map using GPS technology to identify the location of the user on the map. The user can then, through the camera of a mobile device, get a view of the landscape overlaid with the names of places, mountains, lakes, etc. Users can add names of other places, suggest place names, and upload pictures of landscapes annotated with names in Sámi to social media platforms. This echoes other digital practices such interacting with geographic locations by "checking in" on social media or adding a photo of a place with an associated hashtag.

The structure of iSikte (In Sight) was produced by the company Apps Fab AS. The application was not designed specifically for Sápmi or the Sámi languages, and it exists for other countries and regions and in several languages. Names from areas not covered by the *Gáisi giellaguovddáš* project are derived from the Norwegian mapping authority. The application is therefore the result of combined efforts of national authorities, community initiatives, and user-generated content.

Colonization processes have implied the erasure of Indigenous presence and history, which is linked to constructions and perceptions of the land as a *terra nullius* (Fitzmaurice 2007; Frost 1981). This aspect was taken into account in the motivation of the production of iSikte Sápmi:

> Here in the north, many of the Norwegian names of mountains and places have been Norwegianised from their original Sámi names to names that do not mean anything.[7]

This erasure is expressed in the scarcity of Indigenous languages in the landscapes and in discourses that legitimize exploitations. The mobile application promotes a Sámi linguistic landscape, i.e. a landscape constructed by the combination of "road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public

signs on government buildings" in a given "territory, region, or urban agglomeration" (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, 25). In the case of iSikte Sápmi, vernacular knowledge about place names that do not appear on official maps becomes essential. The act of renaming geographical names in the Indigenous language is part of a decolonizing project (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, 158) and is a way to make visible the connection to the land, to the knowledge connected to it, and to a cultural heritage. While Norwegian names in Sápmi reveal a colonialized landscape, iSikte Sápmi offers a way to rename the landscape. The app contributes to strengthening the status of the language and the valuable knowledge embedded in it.

The project manager is the one who determines how the content is to be used, and the application as a tool provides the opportunity to gain more knowledge from others because the users can contribute by suggesting corrections and additions. The empowering dimension for the users lies in the possibility to interact with the app and influence its development—something that is not possible with official maps produced by national authorities. By revealing place names in mobile and digital contexts, the app contributes to the visibility of a linguistic landscape in tandem with the physical landscape. iSikte as a mobile application also has the advantage of enabling the user to explore the landscape through a language other than the one found on a standard map. A mobile phone can thus be transformed into a tool that connects a specific place with multiple names.

While official maps and map services provide information about the Sámi area only in the national language, digital technology enables one to visualize the presence of the Sámi population and languages. The iSikte Sápmi app is a particularly interesting example because it focuses on a neglected aspect of language—the language of the landscape. To make the language visible also means emphasizing traditional forms of communication of knowledge through oral storytelling, cultural history, and land use.

Sápmi 2.0 - Subaltern No More

> As for the bigger, structural [issues], we cannot do anything about these… the Sami Parliament might do things, or the municipalities. But we're not in that position. Instead, we must help to motivate people on an individual level. Anne Wuolab, project leader (interview).

Sápmi 2.0 - Subaltern No More is introduced as a "collaborative art and activism project" on Tumblr[8] "which seeks to empower Saami individuals to reclaim their languages by decolonising their bodies, minds and ancestral homelands."[9] The title echoes "Idle No More", the Indigenous movement founded in 2012 by First Nation women in Canada that rapidly spread around the globe and led to increased collaboration between Indigenous communities and to greater awareness of Indigenous rights. The project leaders chose to call the project *Sápmi 2.0* because they wanted "a new, better Sápmi, without the bugs we have today when it comes to language issues" [10]. The title "Subaltern No More" was described by one of the project leaders as encouraging one

to "to talk with the voice you have", and not from the subordinate position you might have been given.

The project leaders for *Sápmi 2.0* are two cultural workers dedicated to language revitalization in Sápmi. The project on Tumblr is part of a larger project that focuses on revitalization and decolonization. "A decolonial fanzine", part of the same project, was released on February 3, 2016, at the annual Winter Market in Jokkmokk[11]. It supplements the texts on the Tumblr blog with, among other things, a list of "culture challenges" and more information about the work with the project and about the project leaders. *Sápmi 2.0* also has a YouTube channel with short videos in and about the Sámi languages. Another part of the same art project consisted of setting up a Sámi Embassy, which was a performance that took place during the *Ubmejen Biejvieh* Sámi cultural festival in Umeå in March 2015. Citizens of Sápmi were invited to come to the embassy to report language loss and apply for a passport[12].

Sápmi 2.0 - Subaltern No More on Tumblr is a collection of quotations by Sámi authors (e.g. Paulus Utsi, Kirsti Paltto, Nils-Aslak Valkepeää, and Elsa Laula), artists (Maxida Märak, Sofia Jannok, and Max Macké), other community members, Indigenous people outside of Sápmi, and scholars such as Franz Fanon and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Thus, the blog becomes a digital booklet and a multilingual collage of text extracts from literature, journals, newspapers, and other media as well as academic books about colonialism and decolonization. This "collaborative project" brings together many voices, both famous and less famous, in all Sámi languages and connects to the international Indigenous struggle for decolonization. Topics illustrated by the quotations are colonialism and colonial processes, language and the relationship to language and to language learning, and history, including how the Sámi languages were forbidden at school, how the Sámi were objects of study, etc. Empowerment takes place in the way one confronts, contests, and redefines history, as is illustrated by this quotation:

> We are not on the brink of extinction. We are on the path to freedom, a place where we can find and rediscover our own Saami soul. *Tobias Poggats, Nuorat (01.2015)*[13]

Also, the voices of the contributors are unedited because the project leaders chose not to correct the language in order to "remove a barrier of language use", as the project leader explained. In fact, the project leaders have a rather hidden role in the Tumblr blog. At the beginning of April 2016, the Tumblr blog consisted of 42 pages of posts tagged with hashtags such as *#indigenous*, *#indigenous resistance*, *#endangered languages*, *#saami*, *#language revitalization*, *#native*, and *#decolonization*.

Sápmi 2.0 - Subaltern No More was primarily meant as an internal critique according to Anne Wuolab, one of the project leaders. The decolonizing aim of the project focused on encouraging members of the Sámi community to speak with their own voices and in their own languages. But the project as a whole went beyond decolonization efforts:

> When we came to [the part of the project that was] the embassy, we had left the term "decolonization". Okay, what needs to be decolonized is perhaps Sweden, and not

> Sápmi. We started talking about something that we called *sámáidahttit* [to "samify"] – that's the concept we use now. We want *sámáidahttit* – to have the Sápmi that it is, when it comes to language, culture, politics ...

With this concept, Anne Wuolab illustrates her vision, hope, and goal for a cultural awakening and for empowering community members to define themselves based on their own interests and premises.

Challenging structures

In these examples, authority is not explicitly articulated, but it is negotiated in relation to institutions and established structures. The digital initiatives illustrate how authority is shaped by being taken rather than by being distributed. In the context that this article is interested in, there are few resources and obvious experts, which thus differs from the context described in previous research such as that of Rainie and Wellman:

> In the less hierarchical and less bounded networked environment – where expertise is more in dispute than in the past and where relationships are more tenuous – there is more uncertainty about whom and what information sources to trust. (Rainie and Wellman 2012, 18).

In the contemporary Sámi context, expertise is less of a "dispute"– it is rather an empty space to fill, where people with expert knowledge rarely have had a chance to take a place or come forward outside their own sphere. Instead, people have been directed to institutional structures such as the school—which, as mentioned above, does not fulfill its purpose in this context. Efforts by non-profit organizations are "what is needed today, because the state and the framework we have are too rigid—we are getting nowhere", according to *Memrise Umesamiska* project developer Oscar Sedholm.[14]

Canadian media scholar O'Neil (2014, 883) discussed situations where the state is absent and how this affects how power is perceived and how informal decision-making takes shape. In a context where the educational and training resources cannot meet the existing needs, Sámi initiatives have arisen as a response and as a reaction to these shortcomings.

The cultural knowledge that is embedded in language is promoted in the examples discussed in this article, thereby enhancing the value of Indigenous languages and the need to support revitalization. For instance, "tradition" is referred to as a source of knowledge, such as traditional land use and traditional knowledge in the case of iSikte Sápmi. Through such references, a vernacular authority is created that is rooted in the local culture and in a specific context. In a similar manner, language use is focused upon from the perspective of language speakers and beginners and in opposition to an idea of "perfection" in written language. This is obvious in the case of Sápmi 2.0 and the choice of the project leaders not to correct the texts written by contributors, but also in the case of *Memrise - Umesamiska ord och fraser* that was launched before an official orthography was adopted. Vernacular authority is empowering for the users because it enhances and makes visible the presence of the Sámi languages in new

domains and allows re-mapping and thereby establishes the existence of Sámi people and languages that would otherwise be erased. Such authority also allows for the formulation of counter-discourses, as illustrated in the Tumblr blog by the following: "Our languages are not threatened. I think this is an important message to all of us who are working on revitalising our languages." (*Mattias Harr, Nuorat 01.2012*)

The use of digital resources contributes to knowledge production and knowledge transmission, partly through the emergence of new practices for language learning. For Indigenous and minority groups, this might contribute to increased influence, which is in contrast to traditional media that is designed by the majority society and often from the majority's perspective. Mobile technology also implies that information can be provided via a smartphone, i.e. an object that is personal and that the user is familiar with, and such digital resources can be used in private. Access to information in Sámi, e.g. the ability to listen to the Sámi language in everyday situations through a phone, means that the Sámi languages are reappearing in more domains, i.e. several situations and more areas where languages are used.

Digital tools have the potential to be valuable instruments for the strengthening of languages. Only a comprehensive study focusing on the users would be able to evaluate whether these tools have a real impact on how languages are used and developed, but the examples discussed here indicate a changing and more favorable climate for strengthening the Sámi languages. A prerequisite for language revitalization is that the language is used in as many domains as possible, including at home, at school, in the media, at public events, etc., (Huss 1999; Hyltenstam 1996; Grenoble and Whaley 2006). There is also an empowering dimension in extending the presence and use of the Sámi languages to new arenas and taking the languages from private into public domains. Such initiatives might not affect media ecology in general, and might not affect the rest of society extensively, especially because these initiatives are relevant to a limited audience (users of an application or bloggers, for instance).

The dual heritage of the internet, on the one hand being an ideal of empowerment and democratization and on the other an ambition to control, is at work here. The examples discussed in this article illustrate not only how empowerment takes place online in a context where new voices enter an empty space that needs to be filled, but also how control of information and structures becomes visible. In the case of efforts for language revitalization, it becomes clear that digital initiatives are a mode of establishing platforms for a structured work toward the strengthening of culture. These examples are not isolated; together, and along with other examples, they show a path toward alternative modes of learning, activism, and cultural work. They illustrate the dynamics that foster altered roles of information gatekeepers as suggested by Rainie and Wellman (2012), and they form "control from below" that Kahn and Kellner associate with prospective self-determination (2008, 34).

In line with Goldstein (2015), we can see how "between the narrative turn and the local knowledge movement, an epistemological revolution has been playing out that celebrates […] the vernacular." In the same way that Howard has demonstrated how institutional music becomes vernacular (Howard 2008) and similarly to how Goldstein

observes how "the availability of medical information on the internet created a lay population refusing to be silenced" (Goldstein 2015), we can see how the availability of digital tools and participatory media has created an arena for the Sámi lay population to produce, consume, and control knowledge—and to step forward as experts. Their expertise as language speakers, storytellers, cultural workers, etc., has always existed, but the vernacular turn in relation to the digital turn has given the position of experts and gatekeepers to community members wanting to enter the scene and fill the void.

The effects of these efforts on the larger political debate are, however, limited. To a great extent, instances of digital media uses—such as those discussed in this article—address and are significant to cultural workers, language learners, and community members. Possible effects on democratization would require a larger impact and a different primary intention than the one articulated by the producers of the tools described here. The effects on structures and power-relations that has been observed by (compare Dean 2003, Fuchs 2010, and Lovink 2005) do not seem to be of immediate actuality in the Sámi examples in relation to majority society. The impact of these resources on structures within the Sámi community would however require further inquiry that would preferably include a broader range of examples.

By studying a few examples of the digital tools and resources that are being used to strengthen the Sámi languages, one can observe how authority is shaped and how it contributes to building new structures that complement, question, and challenge institutional structures. New players are emerging, highlighting the dysfunctionality and inadequacy of the existing structures.

These initiatives can be seen as constitutive rather than instrumental (compare Dahlberg 2011): it emerged in the interviews that have been conducted with the initiators and their networks that there is a clear goal and ambition in terms of education and ideology. There is also an empowering dimension in the expansion of the presence and use of the Sámi language into new arenas from private to public domains. Rather than making a significant difference in language revitalization, these initiatives contribute to making a change in so far as they set the agenda and lay the foundation for strategies based on the needs of the community.

Notes

1 Following the official definition of the term "indigenous" worked out by the UN. The understanding of the term is based on "self-identification, historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies, a strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources, distinct social, economic or political systems, and distinct language, culture and beliefs". Indigenous peoples "form non-dominant groups of society and resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities" (http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/5session_factsheet1.pdf).

2 There are 10 Sámi languages of which 9 are listed by the UNESCO as endangered and one as extinct.

3 Interview with Oscar Sedholm, February 3d, 2016.

4 http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/dec/22/-sp-reindeer-herders-an-app-

and-the-fight-to-save-a?CMP=share_btn_tw

5 April 6th, 2016.
6 https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.appsfab.insight.sapmi
7 http://www.nrk.no/sapmi/app-med-samiske-stedsnavn-1.8862238, interview in the Norwegian newspaper NRK with Mariam Rapp, District Administrator in the region of Troms.
8 The social networking service Tumblr is a microblogging platform that has grown substantially since its start in 2007, especially during the last few years. Tumblr allows users to publish in blog form, upload multimedia materials, and interact with each other.
9 http://subaltern-no-more.tumblr.com/provsjektenbijre
10 Interview April 15, 2016.
11 The Winter Market in Jokkmokk is a 400-year-old meeting up event that includes a market, entertainment, and cultural events such as concerts, conferences, exhibitions, and sports.
12 Sápmi is not a state or a defined geographical area with official borders, and being Sámi does not imply a citizenship. Therefore there is no real Sámi embassy, and the Sámi are citizens of the countries they live in.
13 http://subaltern-no-more.tumblr.com/page/7
14 Interview with Oscar Sedholm February 3rd, 2016.

Interviews

Persson, Inger. Interviewed by e-mail with the author. March 4th, 2015.
Sedholm, Oscar. Interviewed by the author. February 3rd, 2016,
Wuolab, Anne. Interviewed by the author. April 15th, 2016.

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GunNets:
Why a Theory of Heterogeneous Volition Is Necessary in the Study of Digital Communication

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Abstract
Once abstract, theories of human communication as "webs of signification" have been rendered material by digital networks. Because both researchers and everyday users can see and even expand these webs in ways visible to all of us, we are in even greater need of accounting for the makings of those connections than ever before if we are to understand how everyday digital communication works. In this article, I use examples from online vernacular discourse about recreational gun use to propose that we account for the visibility of the different interests that have shaped an everyday online communication by considering each communication event as a network process of aggregating heterogeneous volitional forces.

Institutionally Empowered Tinfoil Hats

On January 29, 2013, a user named Timic posted a new thread on the Guns and Ammo Forum titled: "Tinfoil hats on - Preparing for civil war?" Timic's post contained a link to a video. He noted:

> This is very interesting video...
> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ri9ioCbqJCU&sns=fb
> Military practicing strafing civillians? Preparing for civil war? you be the judge. Normally I am not a right-wing conspiracy theory wingnut but lots of things starting to make the hair on the back of my neck tingle![1]
> (Timic 2013)

The Guns and Ammo Forum is an online location associated with a mainstream commercial gun magazine Guns and Ammo. On this forum, individual users share ideas and techniques about recreational gun use. Contributing to these sorts of discussions, Timic's post might seem like a straightforward sort of everyday communication. In it, he is playfully expressing his sense of unease at the news that the US military is conducting military operations in the midst of a major North American city by imagining himself (and inviting his fellow forum users) to metaphorically don the iconic "tin foil hat." The tin foil hat is associated with the paranoid conspiracy theorist who hopes the headgear will block the high-tech mind readers she or he imagines are secretly used by the military industrial complex. Timic's post is, in some ways, not that much different than sitting at the bar with a friend and nervously recounting a news item read about earlier that day. Both the everyday chat at the bar and the online forum post are probably mostly just a way for participants in the communication

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event to gain some sense of assurance that it would be a bit silly to be worried about US military exercises in densely populated US cities . . . Right?

Whether we should be worried or not, there are some major differences in the two communication contexts. The potential audience for the online post is far greater than for the face-to-face conversation because the post persists over time where the momentary performance in the bar does not. As a result, potentially many more people might witness the post. This increased power to reach people is, of course, a result of the use of digital network technologies. These technologies also enable the poster to closely link his words to a professionally produced video that gives further gravity to his expression by encouraging individuals to open themselves more fully to his experience of anxiety by following the link and seeing the same video. With a simple copy, paste, and post, this individual's everyday communication is empowered by technologies that allow more people over more time to experience a communication that is amplified by video.

That video, though, is not actually on the Guns and Ammo Forum. Instead, the link leads to another institutional website, Google Corporation's YouTube. Following the link to YouTube, the user can view the 3 minute and 16 second clip of a local Miami television news segment titled "This Just In: Blackhawk Downtown." In it, a seated newscaster in a suit and glasses exclaims: "Blackhawk choppers soaring through the night sky! But this is only a drill!" The scene cuts to apparently live video from downtown (THISISZION42303 2013).

There, another reporter dramatically enacts the motions of an aircraft with his hands and exclaims: "If you've seen one of these drills, it really is like a scene out of one of those action movies; choppers stalking the sky in downtown Miami and the like." The camera turns to capture several police cars speeding by with sirens blaring and lights flashing. The newscaster explains that the helicopters are part of a joint training exercise between local law enforcement and the US military. He tells us that these exercises are intended to: "meet some of the requirements they have to do, also to prepare, for the military side, for some overseas drills, also so that they can make sure all of their equipment is in check" (THISISZION42303 2013).

Then, noting that some people around downtown had been able to capture video of the goings-on with their mobile devices, the scene cuts to grainy footage of helicopters flying by Miami skyscrapers. The newscaster instructs the audience to listen to the audio. Suddenly, we hear the bleeped profane exclamation of the video taker as resounding sharp pops of what sounds like machinegun fire suddenly echo off the buildings. The newscaster comments: "[The police] want us to tell you it is just a military training exercise. But hey, if you happen to see some of this stuff going down, take some video, take some pictures and send it our way!" (THISISZION42303 2013).

To imagine that Timic's post is just an online version of sitting at the bar would not fully account for the several layers of action that work together in this post. To fail to account for this action would be to miss that this increased reach and power is made possible by the Guns and Ammo website. It would also miss the entanglement

of interests emergent in this post. Because Guns and Ammo is a commercial media enterprise that has designed its technology so that it can sell advertising, Timic and his fellow posters are creating the content that Guns and Ammo uses for those sales. In return, the posters and users get access to the more advanced communication technologies.

Guns and Ammo has created this network location for the purpose of drawing individuals who are interested in guns together into a community and showing them advertisements for guns and gun accessories. While sales are a necessary part of the system in any commercial forum like this, the example of Timic's post demonstrates how not just these two interests (his own and Guns and Ammo's) but potentially many more different interests shape a single post. This post is not just the product of the choices made by the poster and the Guns and Ammo Forum. The YouTube poster who chose to put the video up on YouTube enabling Timic to then link to it post has also shaped Timic's communication.

This YouTube poster is named THISISZION42303, and she or he hosts a YouTube page or "channel." THISISZION42303 has posted almost no content in their "about" pages so there is very little known about them as an individual. However, they have posted 4,430 videos since 2009 and generated over 10.5 million hits (THISISZION42303 2009). The posted videos are mostly if not all recycled content from news media and other sources. Though the religious connotations of choosing the name "This is Zion" and a pattern to post news events both suggest this individual might have ideological reasons for posting videos, another likely motive is to make money.

Because the payment structure that YouTube uses has changed over time, we can only speculate, but, based on the number of views. it is possible that this user has earned as much as $80,000 by recycling this content on YouTube (Priestley 2015). They would have made this money by posting videos, drawing users to view their videos, and those users potentially clicking on the different advertising links that Google Corporation offers through YouTube. This means that the Google Corporation has also shaped Timic's post because it has designed the YouTube platform in such a way that it can monetize the posts that THISISZION42303 makes.

In order, though, for THISISZION42303 to have had any video for Timic to link to, the Miami news team had to first produce the original news spot for TV. It is safe to assume that the original live news video was produced in the hopes of selling advertising to the wholly different audience that was watching live news. In addition to the blanket motive to sell advertising, the newscasters in the video stated their intention to let the public know "this is only a drill" and we need not be concerned about military helicopters apparently firing blank ammunition over downtown Miami. The Miami TV producers also shaped Timic's post. So we have now noted that the TV news producers, the Google Corporation through YouTube, THISISZION42303, and Guns and Ammo Forum are all shaping Timic's post. We have not yet, however, accounted for all the actors here. There are also the everyday people who recorded the video of the helicopters with their mobile phones.

Their amateur video was embedded in the news broadcast that the Google

Corporation hosted through YouTube that THISISZION42303 posted and the Guns and Ammo Forum linked to through Timic's post. However, the reasons that the person shot that video with their phone and then chose to send it to the news team are separate from any of the other actors in the network that manifests as Timic's post. Maybe they wanted to help out by sharing information or maybe they just wanted to get themselves on local TV. Either way, they had no way of knowing that when the news team redeployed that amateur video to make their own commercial content for the local news, it would enable a chain of actors to extend the communication: the Google Corporation through YouTube, THISISZION42303, then Guns and Ammo Forum, through Timic's choice to post the link would all eventually be caught up in different redeployments of that footage; each with its own interests.

Tracing these associations across the network raises a deceptively simple question. Who created the content of Timic's post? In a sense, of course, Timic made Timic's post just as he would have performed his face-to-face communication at the bar. There at the bar, we could have also traced back the associations that emerged in the face-to-face communication event by asking things like: How did the bar shape the behavior of the people gathering there? And how did the language the two people shared give them the means communicate? In this way, we can consider the similarities and differences between the offline and online performance contexts.

At the bar or online, its not new to note that its difficult to imagine any communication in as simple terms as a single message that is transmitted by an individual and then received by another (Shannon 1948). And if we are imagining a 21st century barroom conversation, its entirely possible that Timic would hold up his phone and show the video and thus bring a lot more technologizing agents into the bar: the makers of the phone, the phone company, and so on.

So its not that network communication technologies have created our webs of signification and so now we must account for something new. Instead, it is that these digital technologies have rendered our webs more visible. Because both researchers and everyday users can see and consciously choose to make these links, we are in even greater need of accounting for the makings of those connections that ever before if we are to understand how everyday digital communication works. In this article, I propose that we account the visibility of the different interests that have shaped an everyday online communication by considering each event a network aggregation of heterogeneous volitional forces.

Visible Webs

I am arguing that network communication is better understood as events instead of media objects because that communication emerges in the interaction of heterogeneous volitions.

To imagine that an object contains and transmits the intentions or ideas of multiple actors is not new or deeply contested. Famously citing founding sociologist Max Weber in 1973, Clifford Geertz defined what we think of as symbolic anthropology stating that humans inhabit "webs of signification" that they have built for themselves

through communication over time (Geertz 1973). While Geertz could not have known it, his web of significance would take an electronic form with the advent of network communication. When it did, that web moved from the abstract realm of theory to the realm of conscious choices made by everyday people like that of Timic above when he linked to that YouTube video (Howard 2015b). Recognizing that individuals can choose to link their symbols together in new ways because of new technologies is an idea at least as old as Plato's myth of the invention of writing, but its more recently memorable from Walter Ong's extension of Marshal McLuhan's work in communication (Ong 1982; McLuhan 1964; Plato 1989). Along these lines of thinking, the ideas a technology creator has become imbedded in the communication that those technologies subsequently mediate. Extending that argument, Langdon Winner posited all human made objects come to us with the ideologies of their makers embedded in them.

In the 1980s, Winner famously proclaimed "artifacts have politics" (Winner 1986). In Winner's most well known example of this observation, he described the Long Island Expressway as enacting racism by its very design. As Winner tells the story, Robert Moses, the designer of the road, built the bridges over the expressway too low for buses or trucks to clear. Based on an interview in a famous biography of the New York city planner, Moses was accused of purposely trying to keep poorer individuals who did not own cars and, in particular, African Americans from taking the bus to the beach. The claim was later brought into dispute because at that time all buses were possibly already prohibited from using those kinds of roads. In any case, the example now embodies Winner's point that material objects can carry politics.

Starting in the 1980s but gaining considerable popularity into the early 2000s, French sociologist of science Bruno Latour complicated Winner's, at the time, challenging claim that a seemingly immaterial thing, an idea or ideology, could be embedded in a material object. Latour became famous for going even further by actually arguing that material objects have their own intentions. Responding to Winner in 2004, Latour writes: "Technology, in other words, has its own intent and import which makes the best (or the worst of intent) drift away" (Latour 2004). Instead of imagining human intentions becoming embedded in technologies like bridges or the internet, Latour asks us to imagine material things as actors in a network. This idea yields Latour's famous version of "Actor-Network-Theory" or "ANT." ANT tries to account for how material objects and human symbolic uses cluster together into networks of meaning that persist for certain groups and at certain times (Latour 2005). For my purposes, attributing intentionality to inanimate objects is a larger metaphysical issue that raises more questions than necessary. Imagining that technologies are dynamic nodes that emerge out of clusters of meaning in a network, however, is extremely useful when thinking about everyday communication.

In 2005, Latour described ANT in more general terms as a method of tracing back "associations" to discover how they emerge into "assemblages" at particular moments in time. For Latour, these assemblages both emerge from and transmit associations. They can be material artifacts, and, as such, they are also actors in Geertz's web of

significance: contributing their own constraints and affordances to the ongoing flow of the network. In terms of everyday communication online, we can consider both the material and symbolic elements of a communication as part of its web of signification.

Taking this perspective to Timic's Guns and Ammo Forum post from above, the analysis can now push its associations further back. We can imagine how each time someone accesses that post, an event occurs that is shaped by not just Timic, the forum, YouTube, the TV news team, and the amateur video takers, but also by the internet as a technological actor itself. The network technologies such the TCP/IP protocols that make that communication widely available are shaping the communication. The ability of a self-selecting audience to participate in the event of following that link is part of the inheritance of the digital age, and that inheritance emerges in the interaction of heterogeneous volitions including those of the designers of network technologies as well as Timic and the forum and all the other actors participating in the assemblage of associations that is that forum post.

Imagining a communication event as an emergent assemblage born of the associations across a network over time applies to off-line communication as well. However, online communication can render those associations into actual network links: from Timic's post to the YouTube video. When I stumbled onto that Guns and Ammo Forum post from some other network event, I could literally see that Timic had consciously made this association between the forum and the YouTube video in the network that we both directly experienced. At that moment, the network of associations was clearly visible. Timic, and most of us, natively understand and use such networks in ways not widely available before the advent of the internet. Now just a mundane part of our daily lives, we don't necessarily pay much attention to how the associations we make online are shaping our communication. But, today, we can pay attention to these associations, and so researchers seeking to understand everyday communication should.

There seems to be, however, a temptation to follow our colleagues in media studies in their focus on specific media objects as if they were already assembled autonomous wholes: the television show has become the "meme" (Shifman 2013). Online, memes and other "netlore" seem to move around much like the folktales and ballads that the early folklorists so fruitfully collected. Those early researchers traced instances of those seemingly object-like performances through space and time. However, they generally failed to place them into their contexts. Without those contexts, we fail to document the networks from where those communication events emerged in the detail or nuance now possible.

Addressing this problem, Andrew Peck has demonstrated that so-called "netlore" can be better conceptualized not as a genre or set of media objects but as an ongoing practice. Defining "photoshopping" as "the vernacular practice of sharing digitally altered images (or photoshops) across networks," Peck has effectively shown that memes are not static entities that move around like objects (Peck 2014: 1640). Instead, they present recognizable recurring elements when they are enacted repeatedly in

different discreet events. In addition to focusing on multiple events as representing a practice, we can dig deeper into the practice by focusing on discreet events as emerging in the interaction of heterogeneous volitions acting across a network. Taking this perspective, then, puts the focus back on individual people as actors.

In this approach, extending Peck's emphasis on practice, we can look not just at what is recognized as the same across several communications but also trace back the different associations that emerge in the specific online communication events. Thinking about online communication as events that occur whenever and wherever a network of associations intersects allows us to account for and begin to unpack the multiple volitional forces and potentially different intentions that are shaping the communication. When those events include elements that members of a community recognize as marking the events as part of larger category of similar events, a genre for example, that event can be imagined as an emic practice, such as photoshopping.

From that perspective, we can understand a series of similar events as an "emic genre" that a specific community can recognize as a specific practice: telling a joke, polkaing, and so on. Taking it a step further, we can imagine each specific moment of expression as the emergence of a network of previous events that were all shaped by the choices of actors in the network. In this way of thinking, each communication event is a discrete moment in time. Its similarity to other events is not an existential fact (what I have previously termed "empirical") but only part of the network of signification that gives rise to the event (Howard 2013: 73-75). In the case of internet communication that persists over time, that event is the moment where an actor interacts with the post and thus activates, with her or his own volition, the network of previous volitional acts that all associate to each other and thus give emergence to that unique communication event. With this perspective, the challenge now becomes how to document and study these emergent networks of volition.

Methods

To document these emergent volitions, I used computational analysis to locate the most common users of the Guns & Ammo Forum by creating graphs that show which individuals most often speak to each other in responding forums posts or "threads." Noting individuals who interact often and individuals who interact less often, I located all the posts by different users and compared the topics being discussed in those posts.

To create these network graphs, I worked with computer programmers to write PERL scripts that download an entire forum and then place its contents into a SQL database. As of in 2016, I have downloaded 15 gun forums for a totally of 34,105,654 individual posts spanning from 2006 to 2016. The Guns and Ammo Forum alone contains 525,219 posts since its inception in 2010. If I were to spend 1 minute reading each of these posts on just the Guns and Ammo forum, it would take me 364 days with no breaks to read them all. To get a good overview of the data on just one of these forums is simply not possible without a computational approach. The computation approach, however, cannot replace close analysis. While numerical representations

of human expression can direct the researcher's attention to important or interesting content, only close analysis brings the subtle and nuance of individual everyday communications to light (Howard 2015a). Combining both the micro analysis of a traditional close reading with the macro perspective of computational analysis, I can more effectively locate and contextualize the clusters of association in this network that I can then subsequently look at in qualitative detail.

While online forums are not the most common nor the newest forum of social media, they do provide an excellent source for this kind of analysis because they typically offer a large volume of vernacular communication in a relatively normalized format. Because forum software uses specific HTML code to create the webpages of the forum, those "tags" can be used by the script to extract information and place it in into the database fields. For example, the text of each post is preceded and ended by specific HTML tags. The scripts recognize those tags and place the text that comes between them into the associated fields in the SQL database. This results in a database with different searchable fields for all the regular parts of the posts: the text of the post, if it was a reply, if it quoted a previous post, who posted it, the attributes of the users doing the posting, and so on. With this database, I can run complex queries that generate data tables that can then be loaded into network graphing software that creates visualizations of the clustering associative networks or "graphs" of who is talking to whom and at what volume.

These graphs visualize when individual users post in the same threads. To generate this graph, a query is run of the database that counts each time two forum users appear in the same forum thread. This generates a table that lists each user as a pair of nodes and assigns each pair a value representing the number of times those two individuals posted to the same thread in the forum. That table can then be visualized. In these graphs, each user is represented by a dot or "node" and the lines between the nodes or "links" represent appearing the same thread. The lines become thicker and redder as number of times those two users appeared in the same thread increases.

In the graph (Figure 1), the researcher can locate interesting groups of people based on the amount of connections they have to others participating on the forum. The strength of the connections is represented by the color and thickness of the lines between the nodes: the thicker and redder, the more times those two users participated in the same topic. The size of the users' nodes also represents the centrality of the user in the network based on a 'betweeness centrality' calculation. This kind of centrality is defined as: 'The centrality of node v is defined as: across all node pairs that have a shortest path containing v, the percentage that pass through v' (Carley and DeReno 2006: 89). The more between, the bigger the node.

Using this graph, we now have a large-scale view of the discourse on the forum even though we could not possibly have read all the posts. We can tell which individuals talk most and to whom they most often speak. To really get at what each of those individuals is doing on the forum, however, we have to look at what they are actually saying. I have to engage in close analysis to get the microscopic view. That requires actually reading what these different users are communicating and placing those performances into context. More research could even further deepen our data

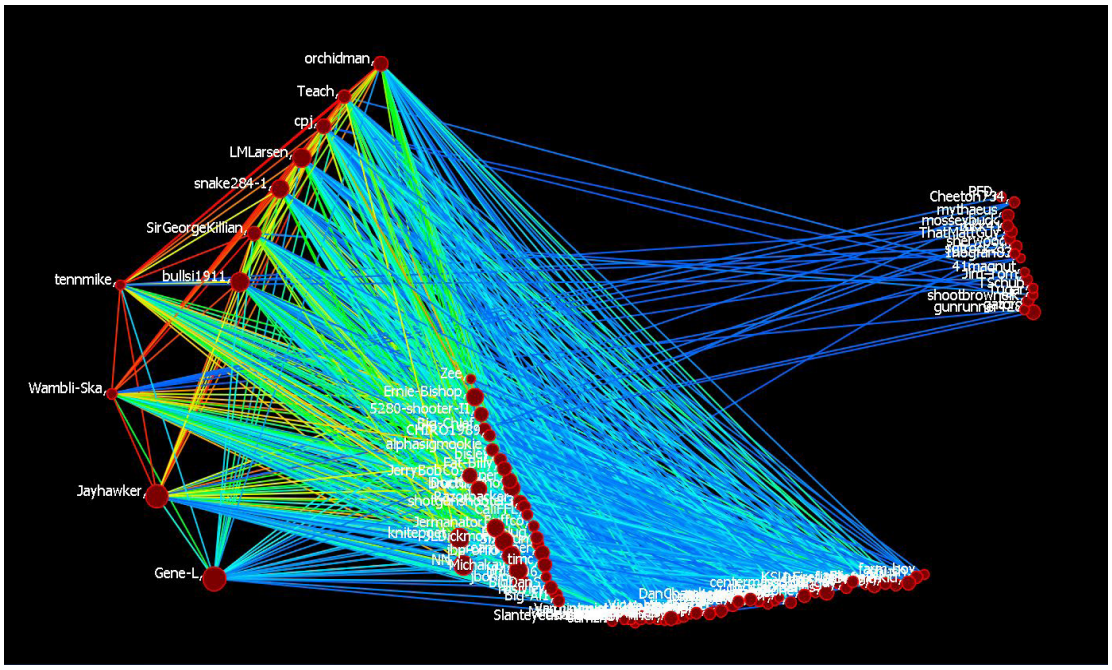

Figure 1. Guns and Ammo Forum user-by-cothread graph

with interviews by adding more context about the individual, their perception of the forum, their other media use, and so on. To locate the posts, I can simply search for all the posts posted by a particular user or users and read them. Picking users that represent central or otherwise unique positions in the forum discourse based on their number or the kinds of connections they have with others, I searched for and read the last 100 posts that users posted on the forum. Then, I located and read the entire thread where those posts appeared. Looking at these threads, I can gain any overall sense of the kinds of communication happening on the forum. In the next section, I will contextualize the overall forum and then look more closely at some of those exchanges.

The Guns and Ammo Forum

The Guns and Ammo forum is only one of many gun oriented forums. In addition to forums, Facebook, Reedit, and YouTube each have their own large volumes of vernacular discourse about guns. Further, these media overall host a large community of online gun enthusiasts who often interact across forums as well as across media. Online forums are an older and in many ways less high-tech form of social media. As a result, they cannot represent all forms of online communication and thus can only offer a window in this complex online community. However, they are excellent for computational analysis because they offer very regularized forms of text that is easier to download for analysis than the complex videos of YouTube or the intermixed media controlled by a wide range of possible privacy settings on Facebook.

Among gun forums, the Guns and Ammo Forum is in many ways a more mainstream forum. The forum is part of the Guns & Ammo Magazine website. First published in 1958, the magazine was offers a largely United States audience "content covering the complete spectrum of firearms, accessories and related products." It claims to be "the most respected media brand in the firearms field" (Outdoor Sportsman Group 2015). The online forum appears to have started in 2011. It is moderately sized compared to other gun forums I have documented with about seven thousand members and just over half a million posts as of the summer of 2016. Other forums are location specific like CalGuns.net which focuses on California gun users with 92,697 users or gun model specific like GlockTalk.com that focuses on the Glock brand of handguns and has 191,992 users. These users often have user accounts on more than one of these forums, and thus move across these and other media to form a larger online gun community. Based on a nationally marketed magazine, Guns and Ammo Forum gives a view into this community through this moderately sized forum that contains a broad cross section of many kinds of online gun discourse.

By looking at what was being talked about in the above analysis of the users that most commonly posted together across on the Guns and Ammo Forum, three topics of discussion become clear: 1) How to . . .; 2) Which is better?; and 3) Politics. Posts that I categorize as part of the "How to . . ." topic general feature individuals discussing specific techniques associated with recreational firearm use including hunting techniques, experiences with loading their own ammunition, or techniques that would aid in shooting guns accurately. The "Which is better?" topic generally features individuals discussing which guns and which gun accessories to buy. In these discussions, different brands or styles of guns were discussed in terms of which are better or worse and sometimes intense debates emerge about which item is best. "Politics," the third major topic, focuses on discussions and predictions of the introduction of new gun laws. At the time of this research, the focus was on the possibility of new and more restrictive gun laws in the United States. Closely associated with this topic, were discussions of mass shootings that might spur gun control legislation and conspiracy theories about the US government's desire to disarm US citizens much like the thread where Timic's post above appeared.

Looking the above graph of all the users, we can see who the overall leaders in the discourse are based on how between they are and how many times they are linked to other users. Users who appear to have larger dots are more between while users that have redder dots have more connections. Looking that graph reveals a lot of interesting information. Most obviously, it shows that there are a few individuals who are highly connected: those with the heavy red lines between them. Those users post a lot and they post a lot in a relatively few number of threads. On the other hand, the graph shows that there are a lot of users who post in a wide range of threads but they post far less often. Focusing just on those who seem to be posting the most and are posting in the same threads very often, three individuals jump out for a closer look: Jayhawker, Wambli-Ska, and Gene-L.

Jayhawker is interesting because he has the most between connection among the most highly connected group appearing on the graph. The rest of the users with lots of red lines between them (those that talk to one another a lot), do not have very big nodes. That means they talk to each other, but not to a lot of other people. Drilling down into this discourse to see what is being talked about, we find that this group of interconnected heavy users is highly engaged in talking about politics. Jayhawker is the most between and in a sense can be seen as the over all forum leader because he is both heavily engaged with this group that is the heaviest users, but he also engages with a wide range of other less heavy forum users. He posts on the full range of topics: the guns he likes and the guns he likes to buy, hunting and techniques, and issues surrounding gun control and gun rights. A US military veteran and retired, Jayhawker spends a lot of time offering advice and he seldom meets with disagreement.

Wambli-Ska stands out for the opposite sort of reason. He appears on the graph as a fairly small dot with several very orange and red lines. He posts a lot, but mostly in threads where the other core group members are posting. Drilling down to look at his actual posts, he is far more narrowly focused on political issues. Often calling for specific actions, like boycotts or contacting a political representative, he comes across as an aggressive activist. While many on the site seem quite hostile to institutions generally and law enforcement in particular, Wambli-Ska focuses far more narrowly on the issue of gun control. As a result, he is more connected to the core group that focus on the politics topic, but he is not very connected to the much larger group that is more interested the "How to . . ." or "Which is better?" topics.

A sort of mirror opposite to Wambli-Ska, Gene-L appears on the graph as a large dot with a lot of small blue links. Gene-L is highly between and he posts a lot. However, he does not appear regularly in the same threads with any other specific people. He appears as a big dot with no red links at all. When I drilled down to look at what he is posting about, Gene tends to talk about the "How to . . ." topic by giving advice on how to best clean guns, how to best mount a telescopic sight, and how to cast one's own bullets out of lead.

Observing the differences between these users, it is clear that the core network group is core because of its interest shared interested in politics. At the same time however, the vast majority of individuals in the forum are far more interested in specific issues to do with recreational gun use. Those individuals engaging in the "How to . . ." and "Which is Better?" topics interact less with one another and thus form a more diffuse network. Jayhawker is unique because he is highly connected both with more political core users and with the more hobbyist oriented users. Wambli, on the other hand focused on politics and thus he is much less connected with those outside the political enclave. Gene doesn't talk politics much, and this keeps him from interacting with the heaviest forum users, but, at the same time, it allows him to connnect with wider diversity of people.

The hobbyist discourse is the more common form of discussion on the Guns and Ammo Forum. It seems to generally emerge when individuals come to the forum looking for specific advice. Discussing hunting specifically, for example, an individual

asked "how much authority does a game warden have"? A forty-five post discussion ensued where users discussed if typical search and seizure rules applied to game wardens as they to do other law enforcement agents (Jeff in TX 2016). In another example, a user asked about how to effectively clean a particularly difficult part of his handgun. In that case, 37 other users (including Gene-L) replied offering techniques for gun cleaning (Uncle Fester 2016). The "Which is better?" topic also elicits a lot of hobbyist posts that begin with considerations of what guns or gun accessories are better. While not as divisive as the politics topic, some individuals do enter these discussions with strong opinions that seem to beyond simple advice. For example, a user posted a "Range Report!" about his first shooting experience with a new handgun he had purchased. For the following 87 posts, individuals expressed agreement with the poster's, mostly positive, assessment of the gun or offered reasons for why similar or different versions of the gun might be better.

Timic's post from the first part of this article is clearly part of the topic that also animates the mostly highly connected group on the graph: politics. While Timic's post only marginally suggests any particular politics, a common constellation of ideas on this gun forum and others emerges among expressions of concern that the US government including its military and law enforcement personnel intend to place the country under marshal law and, either before or after, confiscate all guns in the country. A typical example of this is a post titled "ATF Morons!" where individuals discuss an misguided ATF raid on a toy gun seller. Sixteen posts in, a user states: "The BATF is monitoring this site and have access to our real identities, read the Terms/ Agreements you said YES to when you created an account" (NCFUBAR 2012). The poster seems to be being sarcastic . . . I think.

In another post, a regular user named Jaywatpti posts a common rumor in the online gun community:

> Jus[t] got a e-mail from a friend who checked this out on snoops and some other site's. Marlin is closing it's doors, Marlin is owned by the Freedom Group, which also owns Bushmaster, Remington, DPMS, Dakota Arms, & H&R. Freedom is owned by Cerberus Capitol Corp. wich is owned by George Soros, who is as you know anti-gun and obamas financial advisor. Anyone heard anymore about this ??" (jaywapti 2013)

In another post, a user provokes a series of common rumor expressions by asking why ammunition is so hard to find in stores at that time. A discussion ensues where one poster describes knowing someone "highup" at FedEx who claims billions of rounds are being shipped secretly from the US to China. Another poster counters with a more common rumor claiming that the shortage is because of:

> The Homeland Security purchase of 1.6 Billion rounds of ammo - what they gonna do with a 100 year supply of ammo - 'cept to keep it out of our hands. PBS reports they are buying all sorts of stuff - .22LR up to .50BMG. I'm not saying there is a conspiracy - but if it smells like a fart, it probably is a fart (D. Kelley 2013).

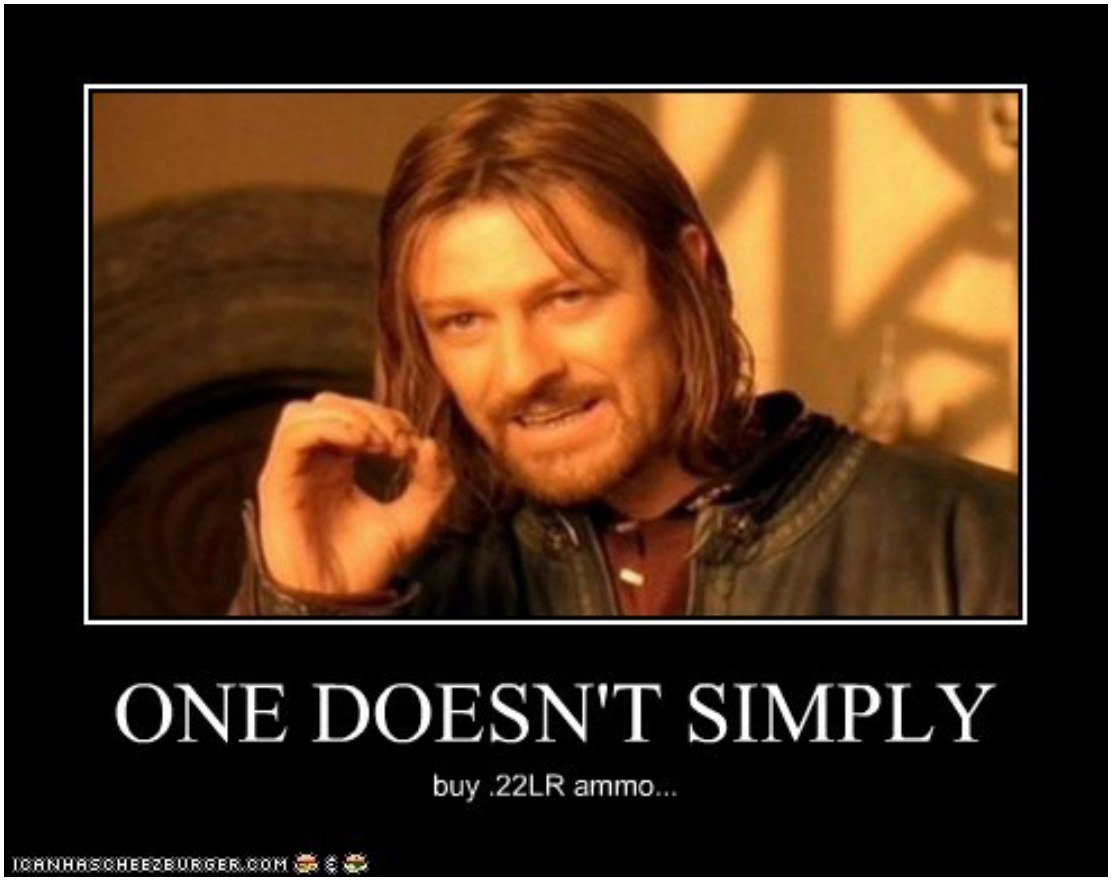

Figure 2. Ammo Shortage Meme, 2013

Nine posts in, a user offers what many would immediately recognize as a graphic meme. Depicting an actor portraying a popular character in the Lord of the Rings movie series, the meme always includes the text, "One does not simply . . ." and the user creates a punch line by adding their own topically specific text (Figure 2). In this case, the joke is about the difficulty of by a particular kind of ammunition: .22 caliber long rifle.

Taking each of these posts on their own, we could treat them the way folklore has historically been conceived, as what Michael Owen Jones and Robert Georges call "transmissible entities" (Georges and Jones 1995: 93). Rumors are a sort of communication that is particularly prone to being imagined as objects and traced as if they were autonomous wholes. Even more, however, so-called "netlore" like this "meme" beckons us to think of it as an entity that moves around being slightly altered by those who move it.

To think of these network events as media objects, however, obscures their networked nature. It obscures how they are momentary emergences of interacting volitions including, in most if not all cases, different volitional entities with different

and possibly even conflicting interests. Imagined as emergent nodes in a dynamic network necessitates that we contextualize these communication events by following back their associations just as I did at the outset with Timic's post. Now armed (as it were) with the network analysis above, we can see how the post is part of the Guns and Ammo Forum. That forum is, of course, part of a larger gun community including that of the forum makers and the forum's advertisers. Those individuals all have at least commercial interests in Timic's post if not ideological ones. Beyond that, the technologies themselves have imported their own ideological influences into the event (Howard 2012). And the researcher could, of course, keep following these associations taking different paths through our shared web of signification.

The Network Corrective

With Timic's post now contextualized in a wider range of associations than it was before, what does this network approach do for our understanding of that specific communication event? Taken individually, Timic's video could be seen as an idiosyncratic expression of an individual. Any student of vernacular culture would quickly point out, however, that Timic's post forwards a rumor associated with conspiracy theory beliefs which themselves have a long history (Barkun 2013; Howard 2011, 15). However, we can't stop there.

It is easy to note how this example as well as others recounted here suggest a certain pervasive paranoia in this discourse community that is coupled with an underlying threat of violence and, often, a disrespect for institutions. What we might miss, however, is the powerful corrective force operating here. For example, the rumor performance recounted above claiming that "the Homeland Security['s] purchase of 1.6 billion" rounds of ammunition is part of a government conspiracy to subvert the United State's constitutional protection for firearms ownership did not go unchallenged. Instead, it was subsequently countered by a rush of responses from within the community—and some responses were even from law enforcement and military people. For example, one user counted up the number of rounds he believed were used by US law enforcement agencies in training. He noted: "Doing some conservative estimates here, [. . .] I get a little over 9 million rounds per year per training center just for handgun ammo" (wildgene 2013). Another user extended the resistance to the rumor by questioning the validity of one blog that reported the 1.6 billon number:

> For one I don't really consider [the website] infowars to be a trustworthy source of information. All of the links go back through a bunch of crazy conspiracy theory websites. The only actual document from DHS [The Department of Homeland Secruity] I found in the links limited the contract to a maximum of 70 Million rounds [of ammunition] per year of many different calibers including .223, .357 sig, .40, and 12ga. (wildgene 2013)

Corrective voices also resisted the performance of the rumor that "Marlin is owned by [. . .] George Soros" who is now forcing the closure of the company. One user noted: "It's an old rumor from 2011. George Soros has no connection." Then he offered a link

to the website Snopes.com that houses a collection of documents demonstrating the claim is false (jaywapti 2013).

Returning to Timic's post specifically, the response to his performance of the rumor that the US military is planning to attack its own population by "practicing strafing [on] civillians" was, actually, less corrective. More than half the responses to his post seemed to agree that the government may be preparing to put down a civil war in the U.S. A striking theme emerged in these conversations where individuals imagined rural Americans pitted against urban ones with comments like: "If anyone thinks they'll flee to the hills. i can tell you the people who live in the hills have thought this through and they don't want you and they ain't gonna share." Or:

> Rural folks have a tendency to share skills, and value people who are able to contribute to the well-being of the general community. Dealing drugs, stealing, collecting welfare, begging for handouts, fathering litters of illegetimate children, and other inner-city skills are not particularly needed in our communities. Experts in those areas need not apply for citizenship out here! (Timic 2013)

However, many users offered a host of reasons, both tactical and more broadly anti-conspiratorial, why the idea of the U.S. military attacking civilians is simply not reasonable. Given the many law enforcement and military individuals on the forum, it was not surprising to see a debate emerge about if the US military and law enforcement would support a fascist American government takeover. One user reminded the others of the extremely positive image of so-called "first responders" that has become widely accepted in post-9/11 America. He referenced the previous posts specifically hostile to law enforcement officers by sarcastically depicting himself as a fascist "thug": "On 9/11/01 I was one of the jack booted thugs involved in the evac[uaction] of Battery Park City [adjacent to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City], herding people up and transporting them to shelters . . ." The most strident poster opposing the possibly of a civil war in the United States stated bluntly: "The notion of a civil war is so absurd it beggars the imagination." He did go on, however, to openly hope that a "COUP against OweBama will go much much smoother" than any direct US military attack against American civilians would (Timic 2013). Nonetheless, these examples can now be seen placed in a broader context that includes not just the singular performance of a common rumor but also the corrective force of heterogeneous voices in the community resisting paranoia, the acceptance of violence, and hatred for institutions.

For those of us researching online communication, considering each of these events as a network aggregation of heterogeneous volitional forces acts as our own corrective. This network correction operates in at least two ways. First, it reminds us that we too are the folk and the folk know it. We all share in the visibility of network associations and the linking that these technologies have made possible. We can contribute to public discourse by pushing those associations further out in ways that provoke discussion by asking questions like what role TCP/IP plays in our daily lives or if the Guns and Ammo Forum should be responsible in any way for the content

that is selling its advertising. We can ask that the publics to whom we speak consider these complex integrations of volition even as they look at their previous actions and consider enacting new links. We are, just as are they, in this network.

Secondly, this approach extends our understanding of recurring network events as community-based practices to include how specific events emerge from a whole range of potentially very idiosyncratic sets of associations. Among these associations, one may be the sense that the event is part of larger and recognizable genre or practice—that it is "folkloric" or "traditional." Including the "folk" or vernacular element of a post as just one of its network associations allows us to recognize how institutional, commercial, and technological forces are also part of everyday communication practices. Because a network event emerges from potentially infinite associations, this approach allows us to choose to explore the set of associations that we think are important without denying the potential importance of other associations that have also shaped that communication.

In the case of Timic's post, I think its important to consider that online gun communication can seem to foster a disturbing paranoia and even potentially some sort of violence. That post, however, emerged associated with many others. In its network of associations, the most pervasive topics surround a hobbyist culture of recreational gun use that seems to benignly focus on which products are best and how to do engage in relatively safe and nonviolent recreational activities. And even for those communications that are conspiratorial, and thus not benign, the gun community itself offers the corrective of reasoned and thoughtful responses—at least for those who are fully engaged in the forum and thoughtful about its content. Looking just at individual posts expressing fears of conspiracy or rumors of wars, we would miss the fact that we are dealing with a folk culture that at least allows and maybe even encourages reasonable discourse. The effect of that discourse occurring across the network seems to be that these individuals as least largely reject conspiratorial beliefs. A network approach offers us a fairer view of gun users than does a media-object, "netlore," or network practice approach alone.

Notes

1 Non-standard language in the quoted material has been left intact in an effort to present these online communications as accurately as possible.

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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

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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 prevon 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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Grappling with digitality—some reflections

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Step by step, ethnologists, folklorists and culture anthropologists are making sense of digital technologies. Questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology have been stated, addressed and continue to be discussed. Does the internet change our ways of being? Are these potential changes something for our disciplines to deal with? If so, how should we proceed?

The articles in this volume propose different ways of ethnographic exploration and thus contributes to our repertoire of research practices. Reading them triggered some speculations for me about possible tracks of continued research. Some are already present and articulated in the articles, others emerged from my impression of the collection of research. As a way to present my ideas, I start from what I think are the strong sides of our disciplines, the fields we have authority in, and the aspects that can make a difference in the gold rush-like expansion of "digital humanities".

The greatest achievement of folklore studies has perhaps not been the identification of certain kinds of texts, but rather the study of the *circulation of "texts"*. Arguments for folkloric qualities in digital media have already been strongly put forward (Blank 2009, 2012); the differences are more to be found in terms of "tradition velocity", that is, the speed of transmission from one link to another has increased with digital media, which not only enhances the rapidness of the spread but also the possibilities of fast reaction and feedback. Here, Howard's study gives testimony to how our understanding of folklore processes can be enhanced by studies of digital media—and vice versa.

The study of digital media also opens up the possibility of revisions of our previous research pre-internet and pre-social media. The image of the authentic folk culture, orally conceived and transmitted and existing on its own outside any practices of writing, was one of the discipline-shaping determinants that both made studies possible and at the same time restricted the range of what could be seen and what insights could be put into words. Although no longer a scientific prerequisite, it has loomed in the background as a model of what constitutes a research topic. Now, an interesting aspect of the studies at hand is how they point to how new media make way for new usages of the alphabet as a communication technology. In social media, many messages are sent in the form of text—and this reminds us to reflect on how writing and reading has been an intrinsic part of everyday life for centuries, in forms varying from graffiti and shopping lists to printed announcements and the (in some places) standard domestic inventory of bible, hymnal and almanacs (cf. for instance Kuismin & Driscoll 2013 on the practices of literacy). Digital media are not just yet another field to study, they also have significance insofar they can make us reconsider how and what we already have studied.

We have a strong tradition of studying various aspects of *everyday life*, including how it is structured by people and how it structures people's space of acting. Not the

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least important aspect of this structuring, the handling of social relations (occasional, fluid, or permanent) by means of social media maintains, as well as defines and re-defines the character of the relations. Studying this phenomenon is a vast field. One question that is visible in most of the papers is how authority is constructed on the internet. Cocq gives examples of how vernacular authority is shaped from filling a functional space where institutional authority is absent or not sufficient. Peck's paper deals with how the possibilities that are inherit in the media make possible reflective processes that feed back into the transmission, and points to the meaning of vernacular criticism as a technology of establishing authority. Howard's study of interaction patterns points to the uneven distribution of vernacular authority. Eriksson and Johansson points to another mechanism that is intrinsic to the technology; the power of algorithms to prescribe choices for you, and to preclude you from the making choices yourself, all the while the authority is said to supposedly lie in your own habits. You get what you deserve.

The continuous technical improvement has hitherto provided sufficient room for action to maintain field dynamics and counter stagnation, on a general level. Thus the optimism about the potential for democracy and empowerment that is a strong internet discourse. But what about the communities of digital practices that are limited to a selected few? There is a myth about communication technologies that seems to be revitalized with every innovation—the promises of openness, reaching out, a public space available for all on equal terms; but every new social formation is open for forming of hierarchies and uneven distribution of access to information. Gelfgren's paper deals with how the existing hierarchies of religious communities are reproduced, reinforced, or negotiated and perhaps even challenged, but always already there to be taken into consideration. The everyday use of intranet and social media in workplaces parallels the communities discussed here, in making the handling of information a means of maintaining the insider-outsider divide as well as the internal hierarchies visible.

The possibilities both promised and imagined that have become distorted or never realized are a source of disappointment about the internet. For example, the rising demands of intimacy in order to keep up the presence in social media sometimes lead individuals to expose themselves emotionally in ways they later regret. What reactions arise from these disappointments? Deliberate removal of one's social media presence? Strategies for a-digital living? The launching of some kind of *off-line cool* as a new attitude of sophisticated exclusivity? (Which to be practiced would need some other communication technology in order to get public recognition.) Or just feelings of and processes of exclusion? On a micro-level, the use of internet as a means of harassing or controlling people speaks of the individual vulnerability that is a consequence of the combination of the media's technical possibilities and the cultural expectations of self-presentation, communication, honesty and authenticity. Digital trust is a fragile social practice re-enacted and reproduced every day; just like digital authority, it is a relational quality never to be taken for granted, a basis for interaction not to be neglected in a cultural analysis.

There is finally our competence in the study of *how people make sense of the world*—and in this context, how they use digital media, and how to make sense of a digitalized world. Several of the contributions, especially the papers of Buccitelli and Ritter, deal with how we imagine, perform and experience space. Where just some ten years ago a digital grid was something that could be applied to physical space, today the experience and understanding of space is more and more becoming questions of an always already digitized reality. Ritter makes an interesting point of how digital media as a 'polymedia experience' are used for turning a diaspora into an interplay of local involvement and virtual togetherness. Buccitelli's study focus the complex interactions between individual contributors, IRL sites, and institutions. His observations also point to the existence of alternative arenas for the reproduction and appointment of heritage sites, to be noted by all scholars of vernacular culture. The steady increase of university programs for "experience-oriented tourism" and "event management" also points to the strong presence of "the digital" as something to handle in "real life".

The other examples can seem more abstract when it comes to space and place, but here it is important to remember that the uses of digital media in an everyday environment can transform every space into an individualized locality. And just as a reminder and a twist, digital media also contribute to making senses, and to localize sensual experiences. Whereas Eriksson and Johansson study the construction of individual soundscapes that can overcome geography, Ritter's study points to food tastes being mapped, localized and inserted into human networks (or establish them). The embodied knowledge of how to transfer your thoughts onto the qwerty keyboard, or the numeric keyboard of the cellphone, is a sensual prerequisite for taking part in the digital interaction.

Making sense of the world—the concept of "web 2.0" was a promise of democratization, with greater access and interactivity made possible by technical improvements. But the same improvements have also made possible the processing of masses of data, which has changed the character of the internet. "Big Data" is no longer a technical/scholarly by-product but a mechanism that affects the way individuals experience the world they live in, indeed shapes the world they live in. In a historical perspective, the introduction of demographic statistics in the 18th century represents a similar introduction of aggregated data as a social force, although with huge differences in velocity and efficiency. Indeed, the social sciences are claimed to have been producing populations by the handling of data (Ticineto Clough et al. 2015)—Howard's contribution here instead points to unfolding ways that populations are shaping themselves on the internet by tracing and analyzing the contacts that are the product of the networks forming. Other contributions point to the corrective processes and institutionalized restraints framing the seemingly individual choices. Again, the question of authority comes to mind, and there is every reason to repeat Buccitelli's final statement that "the encoding of institutional power [into digital technology that increasingly shoot through everyday life] will become an ever more central point of study for scholars of vernacular culture."

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