

The Renegotiated Self

Social Media's Effects on Identity



STACEY KOOSL

Dissertationes Academiae Artium Estoniae 17

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The Renegotiated Self: Social Media's Effects on Identity
Ümberkujundatud mina: sotsiaalmeedia mõju identiteedile

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Table of Contents

9	i. Acknowledgements
11	ii. Article Publication Overview
13	1. Introduction: Social Media's Effects on Identity
13	1.1. Introduction
18	1.2. Research Question
19	1.3. Synthesis
35	1.4. Methodology
44	1.5. Conclusion
51	2. Discourses in Digital Culture
51	2.1. Abstract
51	2.2. Information Revolution, Scientific Revolution
57	2.3. Methodological and Philosophical Problems
61	2.4. An Interdisciplinary Comparison Study of Digital Identity Narratives
65	3. Digital Identity Narratives
66	3.1. Digital Identity + Identity Narratives
68	3.2. Changing Storyteller, Changing Language
72	3.3. Small Stories of Everyday Life
77	4. Exploring Digital Identity: Beyond the Public Private Paradox
77	4.1. Introduction: Defining Digital Identity
81	4.2. Transcending Mediums
84	4.3. Informational Self Determination
85	4.4. Surveillance Society, Transparent Society
88	4.5. Conclusion: Future Research and Interdisciplinary Studies

93	5. Surfing the Digital Wave: Digital Identity as Extension
93	5.1. Numbing, Auto-Amputation and Extension
97	5.2. Electronic Exhibitionism: Selling the Sender
99	5.3. Identity Loss and Retrieval
103	6. Ethnographies of Social Networks: Virtual Ethnography and Digital Identity
103	6.1. Introduction
105	6.2. Experiencing Virtual Reality
112	6.3. Perception, Discourse Analysis and Virtual Ethnography
116	6.4. The Reflexive Self in Virtual Environments
121	7. Artists and Digital Culture: (the strain of) Self Promotion in Social Media
121	7.1. Abstract
122	7.2. Nobody Knows You're A Dog: Authenticity Online
128	7.3. The Ungoogleable Man: Relevance Online
132	7.4. Self-promotion and Self-censorship Online
137	7.5. Relevance by Association and Networked Publics
139	8. Privacy Experiments in Public and Artistic Space
139	8.1. Abstract
139	8.2. Memopol & The Obligatory Estonian National ID Card
141	8.3. The Estonian Paradox: How the Digital Age is More Invasive Than the KGB
143	8.4. Technolgalical Determinism's Effects on the Surveillance Society
144	8.5. Hall of Fame and Memopol: Estonian State Portal and X-Road
149	8.6. The Public Transport Card
152	8.7. Conspiracy Theories of the Tallinn Transportation Card
155	8.8. Conclusions

159	9. Resümee
161	9.1. Mis on sotsiaalmeediauuringud?
166	9.2. Mis on digitaalne identiteet?
171	9.3. Mida kujutab endast märkimisväärne meediamõju?
175	9.4. Järeldus
189	Appendix A
189	Figure 10. Facebook Status Update Prompts
189	Figure 11. Facebook Identity Profile Information
190	Figure 12. Facebook Profile Personal Wall
190	Figure 13. Facebook News Feed
191	Figure 14. Facebook Event Invitation
193	Appendix B
194	Sample Interview Transcript from Artists, Identity and Facebook
203	List of Figures and Illustrations
205	Bibliography

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Article Publication Overview

2. Discourses in Digital Culture Research

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3. Digital Identity Narratives

S. Koosel, Digital Identity Narratives. – MIT7 Unstable Platforms: the promise and peril of transition. Conference paper, MIT, Cambridge, 13.–15. V 2011, <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit7/papers/Koosel%20MIT7.pdf>.

4. Exploring Digital Identity: Beyond the Private Public Paradox

S. Koosel, Exploring Digital Identity: Beyond the Private Public Paradox. – The Digital Turn: User's Practices and Cultural Transformations. Eds. P. Runnel, P. Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, P. Viires, M. Laak. Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 154–166.

5. Surfing the Digital Wave: Digital Identity as Extension

S. Koosel, Surfing the Digital Wave: Digital Identity as Extension. – McLuhan's Philosophy of Media – Centennial Conference. Eds. Y. Van den Eede, J. Bauwens, J. Beyl, M. Van den Bossche, K. Verstrynge. Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie Van Belgie Voor Wetenschappen En Kunsten, 2012, pp. 163–169.

6. Ethnographies of Social Networks: Virtual Ethnography and Digital Identity

S. Koosel, Ethnographies of Social Networks: Virtual Ethnography and Digital Identity. – InterArtive: A Platform for Contemporary Art and Thought 2013, Issue #52, <http://interartive.org/2013/05/ethnographies-social-networks-artist-digital-identity>.

7. Artists and Digital Culture: (the strain of) Self-Promotion in Social Media

S. Koosel, Artists and Digital Culture: (the Strain of) Self-Promotion in Social Media. – Media Transformations 2013, Vol. 10. Kaunas: Vytautas Magnus University, 2013, pp. 56–73.

8. Privacy Experiments in Public and Artistic Space

R. Kelomees, S. Koosel, Privacy Experiments in Public and Artistic Space. – Surveillance & Society 2015 (forthcoming), <http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society>.

1. Introduction: Social Media's Effects on Identity

1.1. Introduction

The communication of identity narratives online has become abundant with the increasing popularity of social media websites. Social media websites enable users to build profiles based on their personal identities, making identity play a primary source of entertainment in the information age. Topics such as privacy, ethical use of information, authenticity, social control, self-expression, self-censorship and other media affordances have all, subsequently, become important issues.

The term “identity” is used here as a framework through which social media use and contemporary cultural practices can be analysed. The cultural phenomenon of digital identity is explored in this collection of seven previously published articles using different approaches, including media ecology, the philosophy of technology, virtual ethnography and artistic research. The articles question the ideology of identity creation in social media, by interviewing artists on how they use Facebook, pointing out paradigm shifts and paradoxes in contemporary culture and discussing other research in the field of digital culture.

Facebook, first launched on February 4th, 2004 is according to Nasdaq worth an estimated 200 billion¹ dollars. Facebook makes its money from selling its users personal data to targeted advertisers. The company requires users to provide personal information in order to start an account on the website, and after that prompting or coaxing the user to provide more and more details about themselves. From asking them to “check in” to provide

1 Nasdaq, Facebook, Inc. Stock Quote & Summary Data. Data as of 26 February 2015, <http://www.nasdaq.com/symbol/fb> (accessed 26 February 2015).

information about where they go, to prompting them to “add friends” to show who they know, to asking them what movies or public events they attend. These affordances are portrayed by the corporation to exist for the users’ own benefit to “get the most out of Facebook”. Personal information is collected and then sold to advertisers, who use the profile information to customize ads that are shown back to targeted demographics. This business model accounts for the change of design in social networks over the years and how they have become focused on gathering “identity” information.

These information-gathering portals posing as social media platforms differ from the earlier days of identity play and anonymity in multi-user dungeons, Usenet groups and mailing lists, when users’ personal information were not yet harvested to this degree for advertising revenue.

There are obvious ethical concerns when corporations dictate what things like identity, relationships, communities and interpersonal communication should look like. According to the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, the idea of having more than one identity is not ethical, it is something he considers inauthentic or phoney.² In this sense Zuckerberg is doing more than just providing a service for people to communicate in new ways, but is also experimenting with social engineering and (ironically) ethics. Zuckerberg’s cavalier attitude to protecting people’s privacy, and complete disregard for the complexity of the human social system has reshaped how we interact with one another, and communicate information about ourselves. There has been a lot of criticism about the dangers of this cradle-to-grave identity lock-in that Facebook proposes. But these grumblings are always overshadowed by the novelty, entertainment and implication of progress that is always associated with new technology. Jaron Lanier argued against the prevailing cultural trend of “identity lock-ins”³ and “multiple-choice identities” for user created Internet content,

2 D. Kirkpatrick, *The Facebook Effect: The Inside Story of the Company That Is Connecting the World*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010.

3 N. Carr, *The Shallows. What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. New York: Norton, 2010.

in his 2010 book “You are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto”:

Individual web pages as they first appeared in the early 1990s had the flavour of person-hood. MySpace preserved some of that flavour, though a process of regularized formatting had begun. Facebook went further, organizing people into multiple-choice identities while Wikipedia seeks to erase point of view entirely. If a church or government were doing these things, it would feel authoritarian, but when technologists are the culprits, we seem hip, fresh, and inventive. People accept ideas presented in technological form that would be abhorrent in any other forms.⁴

So why do people accept authoritarian technologies that do not respect their privacy? One theory that Foucault put forward, is that there have been shifts in power structures from external agencies such as the church or government control of individuals, to social relationships and individuals having to self-regulate and self-censor in order to be socially accepted and fit into norms. In this sense authoritarian technologies mirror Foucault’s idea that modern social relationships replaced the traditional power structures over the personal lives, relationships and social conduct of individuals.⁵ Charles Ess, a Professor of Media Studies at the University of Oslo has published extensively on the philosophy, politics and ethics of computer-mediated communication. He has applied Foucault’s notions of self-censorship to the metaphor of the panopticon: “For Foucault, human beings have no essential characteristics, but subjects are constructed in relation to power/knowledge. The Panopticon is the most efficient power mechanism that creates the body and mind of a subject.”⁶ The metaphor of new media as omniopticon or digital panopticon, and its possible effects on identity has been discussed by many media

4 J. Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget*, p. 35.

5 M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. London: Penguin, 1979.

6 *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer Mediated Communication*. Ed. C. Ess. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996, p. 179.

philosophers and cultural critics besides Charles Ess including Sunh-Hee Yoon,⁷ Kenneth J. Gergen⁸ and Lars Holmgaard Christiansen.⁹ Social media from a Foucaultian perspective would focus on the mechanisms that make the system work, in the case of Facebook: identity narratives, making oneself into content (self-objectification or subjectification) and the sharing of information as performance.

Facebook users usually understand the need to consider the multi-layered context of their friend list, as a particular audience, acknowledging the idea that anything shared online can possibly be public, even if we think it's private. However, in 2012 there was a little media maelstrom about a Facebook photo that was shared, when it was originally intended for a private audience of friends. It was a Christmas photo, of a family standing around a kitchen cooking Christmas dinner, there was nothing unusual or risqué about the photo itself. The problem was that it was posted by Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's sister Randi Zuckerberg, and it included Mark in the photo. Because his sister did not know about Facebook's privacy settings, she was not aware that friends of her friends could see and "share" her photo with their friends. She expressed outrage when the family photo was viewed and shared by people she did not want sharing it. Her public criticism of the person who shared her photo, led to a flurry of news stories about the incident. Randi Zuckerberg tried to remedy the media snafu on her twitter page by stating: "Digital etiquette: always ask permission before posting a friend's photo publicly. It's not about privacy settings, it's about human decency."¹⁰ Lack of human decency and digital culture etiquette were the scapegoat du jour

7 S.-H. Yoon, *Power Online: A Poststructuralist Perspective on Computer-Mediated Communication*. – *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication*. Ed. C. Ess. New York: State University of New York Press, 1996, pp. 171–195.

8 K. J. Gergen, *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

9 L. H. Christiansen, *The struggle for recognition online: When users become media personas*. Abstract from IAMCR - Media, Communication, Information: Celebrating 50 Years of Theories and Practices, Paris, France, 2007, http://vbn.aau.dk/files/16552691/Abstract_side_13 (accessed 8 April 2015).

10 T. Wasserman, *Randi Zuckerberg Not Happy About Facebook Photo Privacy Breach*. – Mashable 26 December 2012, <http://mashable.com/2012/12/26/randi-zuckerberg-privacy-breach-photo> (accessed 8 April 2015).

for the social media platform's inherent design and ideological basis of radical transparency and "one true self".

So how do we interpret such a culture? One way to understand the current situation we have found ourselves in is to consider the medium as a metaphor. As Neil Postman explained: "We do not see nature or intelligence or human motivation or ideology as it "is" but only as our languages are. And our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture."¹¹ Postman followed the McLuhan school of thought that the best way to understand a culture is through its communication tools, as they are a dominating influence on social preoccupations.

Ernst Cassirer, a 20th century neo-Kantian philosopher, best known for his 1944 work "Essays on Man" where he argued that man is a symbolic animal – as opposed to Aristotle's idea that man is a rational animal. Where animals rely on instinct and direct sensory perception, man relies on signs and symbolic meaning.¹² Cassirer, in his study of man's cultural achievements noted that as symbolic reality advanced, physical reality diminished, and man lent greater meaning to artificial mediums such as art, myth and religion.¹³ Likewise digital culture and digital identity are entirely symbolic, artificial constructs – from creating a profile to symbolically representing the self, identity and personhood to symbolic interactions with others.

Symbolic self-presentation, symbolic relationships, affiliations and communities form the content of our digitized culture. The metaphorical function of social media can be viewed as digital identity recreating the private individual as a public service. The once private self becomes a commodity, and personal information becomes media content for public entertainment and commercial profit.

As digital communication technology has become more and more engrained in all aspects of our lives, be they social, professional, individual or collective, this technology changes the way

11 N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, p.15.

12 E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*. New York: Anchor Press, 1956.

13 E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*.

we experience, interpret and create meaning in our environment. Human fascination with the subject of identity has existed since the dawn of time, a subject for the philosophers, academics, artists and intellectuals to delve into – creating a rich tradition and lively discourse on the subject. From cave drawings to social media profiles, we have always used our technology to communicate ideas about our world around us, and who we are in it. In the information age we have become digital information to be consumed and, perhaps more importantly, monetised.

There are contrasting understandings of what the effects of social media are on identity between different groups. The businesses that develop the social-networking website, the people that use the website, and the researchers who study the phenomenon can have differing views about what happens on social media networks. The motivating factors behind the three groups are (of course) also different, the corporations' interests are financial, the users' interests are social and cultural cohesion, and the scholars are searching for insight and meaning or, at the very least, to be a part of ongoing academic discourse.

1.2. Research Question

Building and maintaining digital identities in social media has become an important tool for both public and private entities in the information age. The importance placed on having online representation influences the way individuals present themselves. Identity theory places the self, audience or context and acts of meaning creation (through symbols) as parts of identity formation and communication. This is the foundation on which the research question is based. How does social media affect identity communication and do social media users renegotiate themselves in different ways in online settings? Identity theory is contrasted with theories of technological determinism, which states that technology drives social and cultural values.

1.3. Synthesis

This dissertation consists of seven articles whose research aims were to explore the effects of social media on identity and to compare different approaches used to study digital identity. Identity research focuses on how identity is communicated, performed, censored and contextualized.

To contextualise the concept of digital identity is to acknowledge that it is based in a larger system often referred to as “digital culture”. Digital culture is a symbolic system where individuals construct shared meanings, interpretations and concepts. Culture itself is an environment that always places the demand upon us to adapt. In the 1990s, American psychologist Jerome Bruner referred to culture as “tool kits” that we must learn how to use.¹⁴ The fields of psychology and anthropology have long acknowledged the relationship between man, culture and meaning. American anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his 1973 book on *The Interpretation of Cultures*, proposed that “...man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”¹⁵ In the same vein, this dissertation takes into account the meaning created by identity performances on social networks and in doing so, exposes the ideology of technological determinism embedded in culture and a new media environment that is restructuring the human condition.

The first question that may come to mind is, why pay attention to identity creation in digital environments?

The relevance of the subject can be linked to the surge in popularity and cultural impact of identity-based social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These websites are often viewed first as communication tools and secondly as the products of financially successful corporations. The act of creating a social media profile is a technological, cultural and consumerist act.

14 J. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, p.12.

15 C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1977, p.5.

This dissertation addresses the cultural and social impact of what happens when our sense of reality and self becomes inseparably enmeshed with digital technology.

An underlying theory in media ecology is that all technologies are embedded with an ideological bias.¹⁶ That is to say all tools are intended to be used in a certain way. Another term often used in new media studies to describe a similar idea is “affordances” which can be defined as the relationship between an actor and his or her environment.¹⁷ Social media affordances determine how we act online. We are guided by social media technologies on how to present ourselves and interact with others. Whether subconsciously or explicitly our behaviour and sense of self are altered by these tools and the corporations who design them.

Social media changes our concept of time and temporality, as it asks us to see the present moment as potential social media content to present as a documented past. The increasing popularity of self-documentation in social media may be the result of a culture of hyper self-awareness with a nostalgia for the present. The popularity of faux-vintage photography applications for smartphones such as Instagram and Hipstamatic provide both content for social media, identity information and a paradoxical authenticity through simulation, by making a new smartphone digital photo look like an old film photo.¹⁸ In a similar vein, an established presence online influences the perceived relevance of an individual, institution or business offline.

Cultural cohesion can result from posting the right photo at the right time, with the right filter on the right social media website. We become members of a community by following customs and conventions that do not have to be explicitly stated or forced. Instead we conform recreationally for entertainment, which can be seen as a form of “soft power”. Soft power is a term that refers to

16 N. Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*. New York: Vintage Books, 1993.

17 *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online*. Eds. A. Poletti, J. Rak. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014.

18 N. Jurgenson, *The Faux-Vintage Photo: Full Essay (Parts I, II and III)*. The Society Pages, 14 May 2011, <http://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2011/05/14/the-faux-vintage-photo-full-essay-parts-i-ii-and-iii> (accessed 8 April 2015).

the ability to influence or persuade without using force or financial incentive. Hard power on the other hand uses military or economic means to coerce. According to J.S. Nye, in the information age soft power has taken precedence as the most effective form of propaganda.¹⁹ An example of a non-verbal, unwritten marker of power and persuasion is netiquette. We are not formally taught how to write e-mails²⁰ or make content for our social media outlets, though we know what is considered acceptable or unacceptable content for either medium. In addition to being a kind of social control, social media software is designed to manipulate human interaction online,²¹ for instance through friend suggestions and coaxed status prompts.²²

These hedonistic forms of social engineering are more than minor privacy violations, they are part of larger social issues about conformity, consumption and complacency.

A key theme in my research is that the increased importance of identity creation in social media has had significant effects on the everyday lives of citizens of contemporary consumerist societies. The underlying concepts discussed in this dissertation are based on three crucial questions:

1. What does social media research refer to?
2. What does digital identity mean?
3. What is meant by significant media effects?

19 J. S. Nye, *Power in the Global Information Age: From Realism to Globalization*. London: Routledge Press, 2004.

20 C. Thurlow, L. Lengel, A. Tomic, *Computer Mediated Communication: Social Interaction and the Internet*. London: Sage Publications, 2012.

21 d. boyd, *Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Social Life. – Youth, Identity, and Digital Media Volume*. Ed. D. Buckingham. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007, pp. 119–142.

22 See Appendix A, Figure 10. Facebook Status Update Prompts and Figure 11. Facebook Identity Profile Formation.

What does social media research refer to?

The field of computer-mediated communications contains countless theories that explore the nature of human interaction online and the impact it has on individuals and communities.²³ Social media research is an interdisciplinary field and merges media studies, communications, narrative studies, information sciences, cultural studies, sociology, philosophy and psychology, among others. From this vantage point, any Internet platform that promotes social interaction meets the broadest definition of social media. However, for this dissertation, the research has primarily focused on the social networking website Facebook.

While patterns of human communication and interaction are always being reconfigured by technology, social media research is continually reframed as part of a historical and ecological change. The way people get and share information changes as our communication environments are transformed. Social network analysis and network theory are based on social anthropology research done in the 1950s by J. A. Barnes, who recognized the importance of analysing the patterns and relationships between social actors, in order to understand the dynamics of a mass group.²⁴ Stronger relationships between or with individual social actors can result in a greater sense of community within a social network.

Social media platforms vary in kind as well. Such platforms often include web-logging (blogging on blogs) or micro-blogging (a post that is limited to a small number of characters), image sharing on websites like Tumblr or Pinterest, and creating or sharing videos (vlogs) or audio (podcasts). The literature review that is sourced within this text includes other forms of social media that have existed in different eras of communication history. To better understand the current situation in social networking theory, a short overview of social networking research may be useful to understand these critical issues.

Social networking on the Internet has existed since its earliest years. Sherry Turkle, the founder and director at MIT's "Initiative

23 d. boyd, N. Ellison, Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. – *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 2007, Vol. 13, Issue 1, pp. 210–230.

24 J. Scott, *Social Network Analysis*. London: Sage, 2013.

on Technology and the Self” conducted early research on identity play in multi-user dungeons (MUDs), popular role-playing games, from a psycho-analytical perspective on early predecessors of the Internet (ARPANET) in the mid 1970s.²⁵ Her findings from both observing online interaction and engaging with social actors offline in both private and group interview settings, held that it was therapeutic for individuals to role play and assume different personas in these fantasy-based online environments. Turkle’s more recent work explores how intimacy has taken on new meanings and advocates an awareness of how our social relationships have been affected by our ubiquitous digital culture.

The online stories people tell about themselves are acknowledged to help them make sense of themselves and their environment.²⁶ As Turkle suggests “We have to love our technology enough to describe it accurately. And we have to love ourselves enough to confront technology’s true effects on us.”²⁷ My research is concerned with how, in the twenty first century, we find ourselves, to an unprecedented extent, sharing identity narratives on social media platforms. In discussing technology’s effects on our identity narratives, we acquire an appreciation for the complexity that human identity is in the first place.

Social media research can be conducted using empirical means such as interviews, statistics and self-reporting. However, these often overlook or oversimplify the complex social relationships between self, self-presentation, others and power structures. Feminist theorist Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, and Erving Goffman’s performance theory are often sourced in culture studies to analyse social media and identity. In the early 1960s, Goffman put forward the idea of social identity through performance.²⁸ However, Butler argues that gender is not something

25 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

26 R. Page, *Stories and Social Media: Identities and Interaction*. London, New York: Routledge, 2012.

27 S. Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*. New York: Basic Books, 2011.

28 E. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Anchor Books, 1963.

intrinsic but can be performatively constructed. According to Butler “What constitutes through division the “inner” and “outer” worlds of the subject is a border and boundary tenuously maintained for the purposes of social regulation and control.”²⁹ These approaches take into account the cultural constructs and social pressures underlying identity performance and our need for social inclusion.

There are many challenges in researching socio-technical systems, as social media platforms are dynamic environments. What existed today, may be gone tomorrow, a genre of social media can go from being exponentially popular to obsolete within a very short lifecycle. Previous generations of web researchers attempted to document web artefacts and theorize on the artistic merit of the new medium.³⁰ This medium-based documentation can lose cultural relevance quickly. In the end it becomes media archaeology sourcing URLs that no longer work and references to profiles and pages that are all but forgotten. Facebook’s user interface is updated constantly, without warning and without the ability to opt out of an upgrade. In the appendix there are screen shots of Facebook’s user interface to visually demonstrate the coaxed user affordances via the website’s user interface and design, which has also changed since the screen shots were taken in 2012.³¹

This example highlights the need for social network research to consider both the technical and social aspects at the same time. Newer generations of web researchers will often acknowledge that what they refer to at the time of publication may not exist in the near future. Researchers are challenged by the nature of the constantly morphing phenomenon, which makes understanding people’s social practices even more of a struggle. This is why social media researchers will often describe who they are studying but not describe the state of the technology at that particular moment in time.

The term “social networking site” was defined by danah boyd

29 J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 2006, p. 133.

30 R. Page, *Stories and Social Media*.

31 See Appendix A, Figures 10–15.

in 2007, and updated again in 2013 to better reflect the current media landscape.³² Ellison and boyd defined social networking sites as networked communication platforms which give Internet users the affordances provided by the design of the interface to build unique profiles (create identities), show who they are in connection to others (group identity or network affiliation) and create and share content.³³ In order to keep up with the rapidly changing Internet environment, there is an expressed need by digital culture researchers to keep definitions and terms up to date.

What does digital identity mean?

The term “digital identity” can have different connotations and definitions depending on how it is being approached. For example, when approached from an information management or business perspective, the term “digital identity” is used to discuss identity management architecture. For Chief Information Officers and Information Technology professionals, the concept of digital identity poses questions about identity management strategies, identity data inventory, data architecture, authorization and issues about trust and privacy.³⁴ Identity management architecture deals with the “back end,” the businesses that run the websites that store information about individuals, which in many cases is without their consent or control.

However in this dissertation, the term “digital identity” is viewed from a cultural point of view, with emphasis on media theory, the philosophy of technology and cultural criticism. My research deals with the “front end” – the everyday user. The research takes into consideration the increasing perceived cultural relevance of purposefully creating digital identities online and what effects it has on a user’s sense of self, others and environment.

Technologies that enable people to create identities (through

32 d. boyd, N. Ellison, *Social network sites*, pp. 210–230.

33 N. Ellison, d. boyd, *Sociality through Social Network Sites*. – *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies*. Ed. W. H. Dutton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

34 P. J. Windley, *Digital Identity: Unmasking Identity Management Architecture (IMA)*. Sebastopol: O’Reilly Media Inc, 2005.

technical affordance) rely on tactics of social and psychological pressures placed on the user. Both online and offline, identity construction is negotiated according to contexts, in relation to other people and social situations. This social, cultural and technological process of identity construction can also be seen as a form of mediation where communication is not only transmitted but also heavily filtered. The notion of identity play online comes with the anonymity of the medium and the disembodied user having to create identity information in mediated online ways. Michel Foucault proposes the term “technologies of the self” to describe how individuals can construct identities by telling stories about themselves.³⁵ More specifically the term refers to the ways people “police themselves” in society, which is in some ways a form of bondage and in other ways the mechanics of human nature – that dictate what to do, say, or think. All environments come with a structured set of policies and as McLuhan and other media ecologists point out, our technology creates our environment (hence the term media ecology).³⁶

“Disembodied” is an important term to keep in mind. It acknowledges the way Internet users are potentially liberated from their physical bodies online in the absence of visual and paralinguistic tools. Physical markers such as race, gender, age, dress and other visual information can be obscured in technologically mediated social interaction. Aural/oral markers such as language, accent and tone of voice as well as non-verbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions and emotional information are also obscured by mediated communication. Identity markers and social cues, such as class, status, occupation, age and gender (acknowledged to guide social interaction)³⁷ are also obscured in the digital environment.

According to contemporary and post-modern scholarship, identity is seen as a fluid process as opposed to something that is

35 M. Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.

36 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964.

37 C. Thurlow, L. Lengel, A. Tomic, *Computer Mediated Communication*.

fixed. Likewise, identity presentation on social media platforms is not a one-time grand reveal, but something that is constantly being crafted, one post or status update at a time. Self-presentation online is a form of impression management. Again, this idea is not new. In the early 1960s, Canadian sociologist Erving Goffman proposed that people spend their lives forming impressions of others and trying to influence or manipulate what other people think of them.³⁸ Goffman's work has been referred to as "micro-sociology" as he emphasizes the minutest details in social interactions. For example, Goffman describes how facial expressions change when we think someone is looking at us as opposed to when we think no one is looking, or how our countenance changes when anticipating a social interaction.

Although the idea of multiple identities may sound like a mental disorder, it is a basic assumption of identity scholarship that identity is not unitary. People present themselves differently according to context all throughout their everyday life. For example, the different ways an individual acts (presents themselves) with their spouse is likely to be different from how they present themselves to a stranger. How they treat their child will be different than how they treat their boss. These social relationships are mediated by social identities, which are negotiated based on perceived power structures, relationships, contexts and the need for group cohesion.

Digital identities form the content of social media, the same as television programmes are the content of television and sound is the content of radio. What is different from the content production of earlier, traditional electronic media with the content of social media – is who the content producer is. In part, my research explores how user created content impacts the creators of the content.

Web 2.0, a term popularized by Tim O'Reilly in 2004, refers to user created Internet content.³⁹ User created content is a meaningful

38 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books, 1959.

39 T. O'Reilly, *What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software*. 30 September 2005, <http://www.oreilly.com/pub/a/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html> (accessed 8 April 2015).

change from eras of communication technology where media hegemony was the main topic of debate. Then, the media landscape was monopolized by a handful of corporations putting the content producers in the position of power. This power shift from multinational conglomerate corporations to grass roots content producers brought along its own set of social concerns and ethical considerations as producers and products became harder to distinguish. When dealing with digital identity, the quantified, commoditized self, turned identity information and personal details into a product to be sold and by extension, turned the self into a resource.

My research explores how both individuals and communities are reshaped by the digital realm. This phenomenon has been referred to by cultural researchers as “networked publics”. The Social Identity Model of Deindividuation Effects (SIDE) model holds that the digital culture environment encourages greater group cohesion (that is, social identity) than do offline interactions.⁴⁰ danah boyd defines networked publics as “publics that have been restructured by network technology.”⁴¹ For example, when a Facebook user presents him/herself online in a way that does not directly reflect their offline persona, we can get a glimpse of how social media networks can restructure human identity performance. We can also glimpse into how social media networks have brought about cultural transformations that restructure our private and professional social relationships as well as our sense of self.

The self-censorship and self-promotional aspects of establishing relevance within networked publics are discussed in my “Ethnographies of Social Networks: Virtual Ethnography and Digital Identity” (Chapter 6) and “Artist and Digital Culture: (the strain of) Self Promotion in Social Media” (Chapter 7).

There is an acknowledged private and public paradox to online

40 M. Chan, The impact of email on collective action: a field application of the SIDE model. – *New Media & Society* 2010, 12(8), pp. 1313–1330.

41 d. boyd, Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications. – *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*. Ed. Z. Papacharissi. New York: Routledge, 2010, pp. 39–58.

existence. Internet users simultaneously flaunt and hide information about themselves when negotiating an online self. Informational self-determination is more enabled in an online digital environment than in the offline material world, as online information about the self is made up of user controlled text, images, videos, etc. Passing as a different gender, race, age or affiliation is more challenging in offline settings, where visual signs and contextual information are communicated even before a person speaks.⁴² The creation of digital identities and the paradox of wanting privacy and publicity at the same time, is perhaps only a microcosm of the larger informational trends in society and culture today. Privacy in the information age is the theme of two articles in this dissertation, “Exploring Digital Identity: Beyond the Public Private Paradox” (Chapter 4) and “Privacy Experiments in Public and Artistic Spaces” (Chapter 8). With the surveillance or transparent society,⁴³ citizens of democratic nations have experienced a dramatic shift in how easily rights regarding privacy can be taken away. Voyeurism has become not only a recurring theme in entertainment but also in social policy for the information age. Privacy, data mining and coaxed affordances are all ethical and moral concerns in the digital age, where commercial interest and everyday human interaction and communication are deeply entangled.

Another philosophical problem in digital identity is the inherent narcissism that is embedded in social media technology. “Surfing the Digital Wave: Digital Identity as Extension” (Chapter 5) is an article that explores media guru Marshall McLuhan’s extension theories, and explains how humans react to an overwhelmingly technological environment. In his 1964 work, “Understanding Media,” McLuhan outlined his extension theories in a chapter entitled: “The Gadget Love: Narcissus as Narcosis.” In Greek mythology, the youth Narcissus was mesmerised by his own beautiful reflection in water, and perished as he was unable to abandon it. In other, earlier versions of the myth, he was unable to have the

42 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

43 D. Brin, *The Transparent Society: Freedom Vs. Privacy In A City Of Glass Houses*. New York: Basic Books, 1998.

reflection of himself in another medium, so he committed suicide.⁴⁴ McLuhan's interpretation of the Narcissus myth is that Narcissus was not in love with himself, but the extension of his own mirrored image and in doing so he became closed off to the world around him and servomechanism to his own extended (or mirrored) image.⁴⁵

The mirror stage is a concept that French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan describes as the developmental phase in which pre-verbal children (6-18 months of age) recognize their own image.⁴⁶ According to Lacan, it's a uniquely human trait to be so taken with



Figure 1. Nam June Paik "TV Buddha" (1974)

44 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

45 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

46 J. Lacan. *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience*. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2001. Ed. V. B. Leitch et al. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001, pp. 1285–1290.

our own image – animals eventually lose interest in their mirrored image.⁴⁷

The concept of humans being entranced and held captive by their own images is a recurring theme in media art. The Narcissus myth is a theme explored in Nam June Paik's best known work "TV Buddha" (1974), a closed circuit video installation of a bronze Buddha sculpture, a (then) futuristic looking rounded television monitor and a video camera. The Buddha gazes at the television screen as his image is projected back to him by the video camera in an infinite loop. Much like Narcissus he has become fixated with his own image, much like the social media user he is watching himself as media content behind a screen and becomes detached from the material world around him.

Like McLuhan's interpretation of the Narcissus myth, Paik's "TV Buddha" closes himself off to the world around him, and is servomechanism to his own megalomania, or self-surveillance, suspended in the mirror stage. The popularity of social media where we create and update an "image of the self" through a video screen, is a testament to the entrancing power of our own image, reflected back to us. Paik's "TV Buddha" is a recontextualisation of an ancient mythological theme and foreshadows the future potential of media.

What is meant by significant media effects?

A broad definition of media effects is: things occur because of media influence. Whether media effects come in the form of an advertisement for popcorn, or a news story about a foreign war, the media's influence on individuals and on a larger societal scale is constant and powerful.⁴⁸

Many of our beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are affected by the media. In many ways our worldview and our knowledge about the world around us is based on the media we consume. The most common discourse on media effects in popular culture

47 D. Evans, *From Lacan to Darwin. – The Literary Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*. Eds. J. Gottschall and D. S. Wilson. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005.

48 N. Postman, *Technopoly*.

is criticism for violent or offensive media content's negative effect on children. The well known "Bobo Doll Experiment" conducted by Canadian psychologist Albert Bandura in the early 1960s demonstrated how children would play with a Bobo doll (a large, plastic inflatable doll that stood up on its own) after watching different genres of television programs.⁴⁹ The children in the experiment were asked to watch adults play more aggressively with the Bobo doll, or watch a movie about an adult playing aggressively with the doll or a cartoon about a cat being violent with the Bobo doll. The behavioural experiment resulted with the children who watched violent cartoons, violent movies or adults acting aggressively with the Bobo doll acting more violently themselves when they were given a chance to play with the Bobo doll, compared to the control group of children.⁵⁰

However when discussing how the media affects us, it is important to note that effects come in many different forms, not just television violence. American Communication theorist W. James Potter in his 2013 book "Media Effects"⁵¹ focuses on what exactly media effects are by de-contextualising them from specific forms of media. Potter categorised media effects into eight subcategories:

1. Timing: An immediate effect versus a delayed (long term) effect.
2. Duration: A permanent effect versus a temporary effect.
3. Valence: A negative effect or a positive effect.
4. Change: Difference in behaviour or belief or no change in behaviour and belief.
5. Intention: Whether the effects were intentional or non-intentional on the part of the content producer.
6. The level of effect: Micro-effect (on the individual) versus macro-effect (group information, aggregated data).
7. Directness: Whether the objective was to influence someone personally or non-personally (indirectly).

49 A. Bandura, Influence of models' reinforcement contingencies on the acquisition of imitative responses. – *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1965, 1 (6), pp. 589–595.

50 A. Bandura, Influence of models' reinforcement contingencies on the acquisition of imitative responses.

51 W. J. Potter, *Media Effects*. Santa Barbara: Sage Publications, 2013.

8. Manifestation: Whether the effects are immediately observable or currently hidden (latent) and will surface later.⁵²

Potter in a very clear and concise way exposes how our media exposure has many different kinds of direct or indirect consequences. However, proving that something (such as the media) has a direct cause and effect on something else (such as an individual or society) is much more problematic and challenging as it can become a philosophical quagmire. Causality can be defined as the relationship when one event causes a second event (the effect). The philosophy of causality is an ancient field that may have even pre-dated classical philosophers such as Aristotle.⁵³

Another way of approaching how media can affect us is through the multidisciplinary field of media ecology. The discussion of significant media effects in this dissertation is made from a phenomenological point of departure, rooted in the theory of technological determinism. Media ecology is the study of media as environments,⁵⁴ a scholarly tradition that focuses on the dynamics of culture by analysing communication and communication technology. Scholars in the field of media ecology come from varying academic backgrounds and fields of research, however it is a style of discourse that engages in a critical analysis of culture and technology that separates it from other media and cultural research.

Media ecology is sometimes referred to as the “Toronto School of Communication Theory” originating with Harold Innis⁵⁵ and Eric A. Havelock⁵⁶ in the 1930s to Northrop Frye,⁵⁷ Marshall

52 W. J. Potter, *Media Effects*, pp. 33–37.

53 A. Falcon, *Aristotle on Causality*. – *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. E. N. Zalta. Stanford University Press, 2012.

54 N. Postman, *The reformed English curriculum*. – *High school 1980: The shape of the future in American secondary education*. Ed. A. C. Eurich. New York: Pitman, 1970, pp. 160–168.

55 H. Innis, *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999.

56 E. A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

57 N. Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

McLuhan⁵⁸ and Derrick de Kerckhove⁵⁹ (among others). Innis, Havelock and McLuhan were the three main scholars at the University of Toronto who demonstrated that communication systems create psychological and social states.⁶⁰ The three originally used ancient Greek literacy to support their theoretical approaches to analyse contemporary communication systems.⁶¹

The Toronto School of Communication Theory and media ecology has also been referred to as “North American Cultural Studies” which groups American media ecologists such as Walter J. Ong,⁶² Lewis Mumford,⁶³ Elizabeth Eisenstein,⁶⁴ Neil Postman,⁶⁵ Susan Sontag⁶⁶ and Christine Nystrom.⁶⁷

The term “media ecology” first emerged in a discussion between Marshall McLuhan, Eric McLuhan and Neil Postman in 1967.⁶⁸ Media ecologists push for more discussion on the way that technology infiltrates our everyday life and affects us, including changes to the way we view the world, interact with others and self-identify within these constructs.

Neil Postman explains how technological change is ecological not additive, that is to say, it does not add something new; rather

58 M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.

59 D. de Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture: Investigating the New Electronic Reality*. London: Kogan Page, 1997.

60 D. de Kerckhove, McLuhan and the “Toronto School of Communication”. – *Canadian Journal of Communication* 1989, Vol. 14, No. 4, p. 73, <http://www.cjc-online.ca/index.php/journal/article/view/533/439> (accessed 8 April 2015).

61 D. de Kerckhove, McLuhan and the “Toronto School of Communication”.

62 W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*. New York: Routledge, 1982.

63 L. Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: Technics and Human Development*. San Diego: Harcourt Publishers Ltd, 1971.

64 E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change and the Structure of Communication Revolutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980.

65 N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. London: Penguin Books, 2005.

66 S. Sontag, *On Photography*. London: Penguin, 1979.

67 C. Nystrom, *Towards a Science of Media Ecology: The Formulation of Integrated Conceptual Paradigms for the Study of Human Communication Systems*. Doctoral Dissertation. New York University, 1973.

68 C. Anton, *Communication Uncovered: General Semantics and Media Ecology*. Fort Worth: Institute for General Semantics, 2011.

it changes everything.⁶⁹ Postman argues it is not possible to discuss technological effects as separate from the social and cultural spheres, as the two are so enmeshed. If we add a drop of red dye to a beaker of water, does the water and dye separate – are we left with a bead of red dye floating in otherwise clear water? Or does the dye mix with the water, making it something altogether different?

Likewise, technological change, such as the introduction of a new form of technology or mediated forms of communication changes the world around it, into something completely different. Taking into account this change in perception does affect the hermeneutic aims of the discourse on digital culture, on how to read, analyse and interpret the environment.

A good example of the exploration of significant media effects in media ecology is Robert K. Logan's "The Alphabet Effect: The Impact of the Phonetic Alphabet on the Development of Western Civilization" first published in 1986. The work analysed the historical and cultural impact of the alphabet across different global regions and alphabetic literacy theory. The alphabet effect theory demonstrates how the shift from an illiterate to literate populations changed the world around it, including not only the shift from an oral to a literary (or written) culture, but also to the rise of abstract thinking (coding and decoding information), logic, codified law, objective history, individualism and monotheism.⁷⁰

1.4. Methodology

The theoretical framework of this dissertation is based on identity theory and the theory of technological determinism. The dissertation uses a qualitative and critical approach to compare and contrast different concepts and methods currently used to

69 N. Postman, Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change. Presented at: The New Technologies and the Human Person: Communicating the Faith in the New Millennium. Denver, Colorado, 27 March 1998, <http://www.mat.upm.es/~jcm/neil-postman--five-things.html> (accessed 11 October 2011).

70 R. K. Logan, *The Alphabet Effect: The Impact of the Phonetic Alphabet on the Development of Western Civilization*. New York: William Morrow, 1986.

research digital identity. Identity discourse bridges many different disciplines including narrative studies (Chapters 3), media ecology and the philosophy of technology (Chapters 2 and 5), digital ethnography (Chapters 6 and 7) and artistic research (Chapter 8). Methodological and philosophical challenges in the field of digital culture research are discussed and demonstrated in order to expose the creative dynamics of this particular interdisciplinary field of study.

Identity theory is often used as a framework through which digital identity studies, social media use and contemporary cultural practices are analysed. Identity theory emphasizes the importance of self, and how identity is communicated, performed, censored and contextualized.⁷¹ Giddens held that self-identity is made up of reflexive identity narratives customized by different social contexts and needs.⁷² “Social identity” is another term used to describe this reflexive nature, however it has been labeled as redundant by some identity scholars, as all identities are social.⁷³

Goffman’s impression management theory uses the theater and the stage as a metaphor to show how social actors perform different aspects of their identities in different situations and contexts.⁷⁴ Goffman’s work has been referred to as “micro-sociology” as it blends qualitative analysis with symbolic interactionist perspective.⁷⁵ What differentiates this work from other digital identity research is that it also contrasts reflexive theory (such as identity theory and ethnographic approaches) with a determinist theory (the technological imperative and technological determinism).

Shifts in meaning, and the influence of our new media/metaphors are discussed in this dissertation. The effects on two main groups are the focus – the people who use social media networks and the researchers who study the phenomenon. The discussions in the articles can also be divided conceptually into philosophical and methodological enquiries into how to approach the topic of

71 P. J. Burke, J. E. Stets, *Identity Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

72 A. Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

73 R. Jenkins, *Social Identity*. London: Routledge, 2008.

74 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

75 B. R. Schlenker, *Impression management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*, Brooks/Cole: Monterey, 1980.

identity in the age of social media. The articles were written in response to conference and journal calls and to engage with the academic community on topics surrounding digital identity, a topic that has attracted great academic interest and inspired a flurry of activity. The research reflects the different angles and approaches that are used by different communities to discuss what is essentially the same topic.

The articles in this dissertation were presented at art history, media studies, digital humanities, narrative studies, media ecology, popular culture, digital heritage and philosophy of media conferences that had sub-panels that dealt more explicitly with aspects of digital identity. Through public presentation, peer reviews and feedback, publishing both online and print, the articles are part of a global network of research. Though separated geographically and coming from different specialty areas – the articles present overlapping theories, approaches and use of terms to give a current overview of what is happening internationally in the interdisciplinary field of digital identity research.

In “Discourses in Digital Culture” (Chapter 2), digital culture as an emerging field of study is discussed from the perspective of the philosophy of science as a way of interpreting the current situation⁷⁶ in the field of digital culture research.⁷⁷ There is no methodology that can be turned to by default in the field of digital culture scholarship, as there is no singular and consistent discourse on digital culture. This makes a case for the interdisciplinary nature of the field. Digital culture is being studied in many different fields with methodologies deriving from art and philosophy, computer science, the humanities and social sciences.

Thomas Kuhn, an American physicist and philosopher is best known for introducing the term “paradigm shift” in his groundbreaking 1962 publication “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions” which to this day is a seminal work in the philosophy of science. The current state of the field exhibits many signs of a

76 A. F. Chalmers, *What Is This Thing Called Science?* Third Edition. Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1999.

77 K. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. New York: Routledge, 1963.

science in its early developmental stages, that is to say, a science or method that has yet to build up a system of established methodological frameworks and a universally accepted paradigm. Kuhn defines the latter as the criteria necessary for a developed science – one where all fields have evolved to build established frameworks and paradigms.⁷⁸

Becker further defines Kuhn's paradigm as "an example of the virtues scientific work might have, in a combination that shows what work should look like in order to contribute to the discipline."⁷⁹ On the other hand, there is a need for a standardized, scientific, traditional research framework. This, however, may be an anachronism as the alternative can lead to more innovative findings and more individual freedom for the researcher. The development of a universally accepted paradigm⁸⁰ on how we can discuss, approach and interpret digital culture may not even be needed in a post-modern world. However, the combination of different methodological approaches can be beneficial, as it can bring together different parts of the same whole.

The article "Digital Identity Narratives" (Chapter 3) focuses on methodological analysis and the strengths and weaknesses of studying identity narratives through psychology, ethnography and literary theory. Narrative theory explores the topic of identity as both a personal and cultural construction, an expression of a particular time and place in history. The importance of identity narratives (a story about the self) is seen as a crucial part of human existence to the extent that without a story around something it does not exist.⁸¹ Identity narratives are the stories we tell about ourselves and our world, they are told to make sense and to give meaning to both personal and cultural beings.⁸²

78 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Third Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

79 H. S. Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Second edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 138.

80 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

81 P. J. Eakin, *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2008.

82 J. Brockmeier, D. Carbaugh, *Narrative and Identity, Studies in Narrative*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001.

Identity and cognitive research have long been associated with psychology and sociology, while narrative research was at one time the domain of literary theory. The two approaches clashed, as psychology was more rigid in its acceptance of deviations from normality in identity presentation and interpretation. Literary criticism, on the other hand allowed for more irregularities, drawing the comparison between literature being like the wilderness and psychology a garden.⁸³ Mid-twentieth century post-modern rhetoric embraced the notion of separation and fragmentation applied to the subjective self. Identity as a topic in academic discourse became something that was no longer fixed or set: identity was seen more as something liquid, constantly changing, chameleon-like to match its environment.⁸⁴

Sociolinguists have researched the relationship between identity, language and discourse. They have experienced revolutions in their field as previous models of the relationship between identity, linguistics and social variables have been challenged by new approaches.⁸⁵ The narrative structure of online communication has attracted interest from sociolinguists, as digital culture has developed a unique vernacular (possibly created by the technological environments themselves) and a new pace and space for communication. Much like William Labov studied the African American English vernacular and in doing so developed a methodology for sociolinguists⁸⁶, so studying the vernacular used in online communities could help develop a framework for the field of digital culture studies. In many ways digital narratives have more in common with spoken conversation rather than with written communication and literature genres. This different form of online written communication has been referred to as “spoken

83 D. Albright, *Literary and Psychological Models of the Self. – The Remembering Self*. Eds U. Neisser, R. Fivush. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

84 A. Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991.

85 *Discourse and identity*. Eds. A. D. Fina, D. Schiffrin, M. Bamberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

86 W. Labov, *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972, pp. 354–96.

written communication” by Irene Kacandes⁸⁷ or “secondary orality” by Walter Ong.⁸⁸ Spoken written communication is further explored by sociolinguists and digital narrative researchers such as Ruth Page in her work on “Interactivity and Interaction: Text and Talk in Online Communities”⁸⁹ and Jannis K. Androutsopoulos in “Sociolinguistics and Computer Mediated Communication.”⁹⁰

The article “Surfing the Digital Wave: Identity as Extension Theory” (Chapter 6) is based on McLuhan’s extension theories, which are rooted in the philosophy of technology, phenomenology and Gestalt psychology. These theories explain how humans react to a highly technological environment. McLuhan traces an inventory of effects which include numbing, auto-amputation and extension. These are the reactions to what he refers to as an “electric age” – what we currently refer to as the information age or digital age. As both individuals and information experience the effects of decentralization, integration and acceleration of pace, communication has shifted away from being specialist and linear to simultaneous and ambiguous in meaning.⁹¹ As we experience an information overload, bombarded with advertising and the various mediums of inter-personal communication, the context or form of the content encodes the meaning, or in other words, in the famous McLuhan maxim “the medium is the message”.⁹² The social importance or personal involvement in a text message, tweet, phone call, fax or wall post are embedded in meta-information, in which the context gives significance to the text.

The amplification of communication mediums combined with the increasingly ambiguous, spontaneous, meaningless information that is constantly being transmitted leads to a numbing

87 I. Kacandes, *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001.

88 W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

89 R. Page, *Interactivity and Interaction: Text and Talk in Online Communities*. – *Intermediality and Storytelling*. Eds. M. Grishakova, M. L. Ryan. Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010.

90 J. Androutsopoulos, *Introduction: Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication*. – *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2004, no 10/4, pp. 419–438. https://jannisandroutsopoulos.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/jslx_10-4_intro.pdf (accessed 8 April 2015).

91 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

92 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p.7.

response on the individual, in order to maintain equilibrium. Much like spam and advertisements are observed but disregarded, so are many forms of digital communication. Thus new perceptual habits are brought about and it has been suggested that society is so deeply influenced by new technological environment that eventually art and communication shape society in their image.⁹³ Social media is a perfect illustration of this idea, as it is an environment where collectivism is valued over individuality, where living a public life is more valued than having privacy and where corporate interdependence is valued over corporate independence.

When attempting to communicate a critical analysis of our relationship with technology and its impact on our lives, ethnographers assert we must reject the assumption that there are inherent characteristics of technology that affect us.⁹⁴ We should instead concentrate on different ways of thinking about our relationship with technology, our assumptions, attitudes, perceptions and experiences.⁹⁵ For these reasons ethnography can be seen as a useful methodological tool for exploring the ways identity is communicated, interpreted and experienced by social media users.⁹⁶

Two articles in this dissertation discuss and utilize virtual ethnography as a methodology for studying digital identity. In “Ethnographies of Social Networks: Virtual Ethnography and Digital Identity” (Chapter 6) an ethnographic approach is discussed as a way of conducting digital culture research. Virtual ethnography provides a reflexive, qualitative research methodology that communicates the complexity of mediated forms of interaction, experience and perception in a virtual environment.⁹⁷

93 H. H. Crosby, G. R. Bond, *The McLuhan Explosion, A Casebook on Marshall McLuhan and Understanding Media*. New York: American Book Company, 1968.

94 K. Grint, D. Woolgar, *The Machine at Work: Technology, Work and Organization*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997.

95 C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage Publications, 2000.

96 E. Ardèvol, *Virtual/Visual Ethnography, Methodological Crossroads at the Intersection of Visual and Internet Research*. – *Advances in Visual Methodology*. Ed. S. Pink. London: Sage, 2012.

97 E. Ardèvol, A.Roig, *Researching media through practices: an ethnographic approach*. – *Digithum, The Humanities in the Digital Era* 2009, Iss. 11, pp.1–6. http://digithum.uoc.edu/index.php/digithum/article/viewFile/n11_ardevol_roig/n11_reaching_media_through_practices (accessed 8 April 2015).

Merging virtual ethnography and qualitative research, this article discusses how users from creative backgrounds (such as artists, academics and writers) communicate self-representation by interpreting how others communicate identity in social networks. This article is written with an aim to further explore the topic of experience, perception and corporeality in digital culture – using an ethnographic approach.

“Artists, Academics and Digital Culture: (the strain of) Self-Promotion in Social Media” (Chapter 7) further explores the paradigmatic, cultural shift in perceived meaning between what is real and what is virtual as well as the flip between what is considered relevant and what is no longer relevant. The article sources interviews conducted with artists and academics, most of whom are associated with the Estonian Academy of Arts or the Estonian Academy of Music and Theater between May and August of 2012. The topics of authenticity and relevance, self-promotion and self-censorship and how to negotiate a professional identity were recurring themes in the interviews.

One artist and academic found that using Facebook as a platform for professional self-promotion created relationship strains; the new digital environment de-humanized and devalued an artist’s invitation to their event. Facebook allows users to make their profile and event invitation pages either private or public when inviting others to their public events and exhibitions. An invitation to a select group of Facebook friends can cause certain tensions to arise when an individual does not receive appreciation or support from their peer group. Although other recent studies⁹⁸ on academic social media use⁹⁹ have suggested that Facebook is not usually the platform used to negotiate a professional identity online, in this particular group of Estonia-based artists and academics, the opposite opinion was expressed.

98 K. Barbour, P. D. Marshall, *Persona and the Academy: Making Decisions, Distinctions and Profiles in the Era of Presentational Media*. World Congress on Communication and Arts, São Paulo, 17–20 April 2011, http://www.academia.edu/452607/Persona_and_the_Academy_making_decisions_distinctions_and_profiles_in_the_era_of_presentational_media (accessed 8 April 2015).

99 C. Davison, *Presentation of digital self in everyday life: towards a theory of digital identity*. Melbourne: RMIT University, 2012.

There are underlying assumptions in media theory that dictate how to undertake a critical analysis of our relationship with communication technologies. One is the idea that technology dictates our behaviour – which is the theory of technological determinism in the philosophy of technology, media ecology and affordance theory. The other assumption rejects that there are inherent characteristics of technology that affect us.¹⁰⁰ For example, ethnographic approaches concentrate on different ways of thinking about our relationship with technology, focusing on individual assumptions, attitudes, perceptions and experiences.¹⁰¹ The ethnographic approach offers a qualitative research methodology that communicates the complexity of mediated forms of interaction, experience and perception in a virtual environment, that may be used to analyse how smaller groups of people interpret meaning in everyday life.¹⁰² Virtual ethnography and visual ethnography¹⁰³ provide social media researchers a reflexive way of describing how identity is communicated and interpreted by social media users.

Users expressed discomfort when their Facebook friends “overshare” and divulge too much personal information that was not of interest to them. They also expressed discomfort or distrust when their friends did not share enough personal information. Social network users accused others of posturing to try to make themselves look happier, more successful, more important or more socially connected than they are in real life (offline). Interviewed social network users expressed the need to “read between the lines”, or as one respondent phrased it “play detective” to find out who the person behind the profile really is, often by association, who they are friends with, what they like, what affiliations they have and so forth.

The interviews were based on attitudes and experiences about the social media platform in a specific group context (artists

100 K. Grint, D. Woolgar, *The Machine at Work*.

101 C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*.

102 E. Ardèvol, A. Roig, *Researching media through practices*.

103 S. Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. London: Sage, 2006.

associated with academies) and grounded in media ecology theory. This was done as an attempt to bridge the seemingly contradictory affordance theory with technological determinism.

1.5. Conclusion

To summarise contributions of this research to existing knowledge:

- Identity and social interactions are performed differently on Facebook (online) than in the “real world” (offline). Although identity performance, impression management and informational self-determination affordances are more enabled in online environments – identity and social interactions are not carbon copies online and offline.
- One of the key findings of the “Artists, Identity and Facebook” study is that the medium (Facebook) is about self-promotion and not self-expression. Facebook can be seen as a networked public that demands self-censorship, restraint and professionalism. This idea of the commodified self is explored philosophically, as there will be significant media effects when the freedom expected in expressing personal identity turns into public relations projects afforded by social media websites.
- The rise of the surveillance society and the popularity of anti-privacy based entertainment such as social networks exist in tandem, and are a marked characteristic of contemporary culture.
- Earlier paradigms of identity play, anonymity and personalization online (see Sherry Turkle’s research on MUDS¹⁰⁴ and Jaron Lanier’s research on MySpace¹⁰⁵) are demonstrated as being more progressive, humanistic and intellectually complex than current paradigms of “one true self”, identity lock-ins¹⁰⁶ and radical transparency.

104 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

105 J. Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget*. London: Penguin Creativity, 2010.

106 N. Carr, *The Shallows*.

The central concept of the seven articles in this dissertation is focused on issues of privacy versus publicity, informational self-determination versus the technological imperative and the perceived relevance of the “real” versus the virtual. The challenge is explaining, analysing and interpreting how our culture, relationships and even our sense of self are altered by our technological dependencies. When Marshall McLuhan noted that “we shape our tools, and thereafter our tools shape us” the idea was based in broader cultural theory and ran parallel to ideas held in semiotics, philosophy and anthropology.¹⁰⁷ The premise is that language is limiting and does not describe something, as much as it dictates how we understand and perceive things.

This leads us into a core philosophical problem of technology – that much like language transforms the world, so do tools of communication, which results in changes of meaning.¹⁰⁸ Agency is a term used to describe an individual’s ability to consciously influence others through social means and personal experience. Post-humanism, a concept based in critical theory and originating in contemporary art and philosophy, can be helpful when separating what human identity and agency mean when re-structured in other states. Whereas humanist discourse focuses on topics such as exploitation, colonialism and democracy, post- or trans-humanism exposes the seedy underbelly of liberal capitalism by taking a critical stance and demanding new ways of thinking about the human condition, agency and identity.¹⁰⁹

Issues of individual privacy were examined by interviewing artists about how they use Facebook in my articles on “Ethnographies of Social Networks: Virtual Ethnography and Digital Identity” (Chapter 6) and “Artists and Digital Culture: (the strain of) Self Promotion in Social Media” (Chapter 7). The idea of mass

107 M. McLuhan, Q. Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*. San Francisco: HardWired, 1996.

108 H. Ruin, *Technology as Destiny in Cassirer and Heidegger: Continuing the Davos Debate*. – Ernst Cassirer on Form and Technology: Contemporary Readings. Eds A. S. Hoel, I. Folkvord. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

109 A. Zaretsky, *Bioart In Question: Adam Zaretsky talks with Shannon Bell, Sam Bower, Dmitry Bulatov, George Gessert, Kathy High, Ellen K. Levy, Oron Catts & Ionat Zurr and Jennifer Willet*. – CIAC’s Electronic Magazine 2005, No 23, http://magazine.ciac.ca/archives/no_23/en/entrevue.htm (accessed 8 April 2015).

invasions of privacy are discussed in “Privacy Experiments in Public and Artistic Spaces” (Chapter 8), an article that showed how surveillance technology in both the public and private sphere, as well as social and cultural shifts brought about by digital media have created passive, apathetic paradigms about privacy. Entrusting too much personal information to the state and private corporations like Google and Facebook, has not received enough public discourse vis-à-vis threats to personal privacy and civil liberties. This thesis argues that this is because of the nature of our media ecology – a nature that does not question the validity or ideological basis of such technology, as technology is seen as synonymous with progress.

In “Privacy Experiments in Public and Artistic Spaces” (Chapter 8), artistic experiments, like Estonian artist Timo Toots’ “Memopol” (2010) are discussed as possible catalysts for social change and a greater sense of respect for the protection of personal information. Toots’ installation is able to direct public attention to topics of privacy, technology and surveillance society with artistic privacy experiments in the form of interactive installation exhibited in the public sphere. In Timo Toots’ installations “Hall of fame” (2009) and “Memopol” art and technology, and issues of privacy versus public information are presented to the audience in an accessible yet provocative way. The interactive installations capture contemporary fears and concerns, as citizens of supposedly free, democratic nations find themselves living in a surveillance society with a “Big Brother” like all knowing government. “Hall of fame” and “Memopol” (built around the use of the obligatory Estonian national ID-card) make the current situation of privacy and personal information visually explicit and ironically reformulated.

A cultural shift occurred with the move to digital media, and with it, an obsolescence of corporal existence in the real world in exchange for a virtual existence online. In our technologically determinist culture we increasingly depend on digital media for validating offline information, which places us in a paradigmatic shift where the offline (real) loses importance while the online (virtual) gains meaning. A practical example of the metaphorical obsolescence of the real or material (offline), is whether you would

trust information you found out Wikipedia more than a book, or Google search results more than something your mother told you.

Obsolescence is a pivotal term used in media ecology. Compared to everyday use of the term, which signifies an end, obsolescence in media ecology instead indicates a different phase, in a sense a beginning.¹¹⁰ Once the novelty of a new technology or phenomena has worn off and wide use and general acceptance have set in, pervasive effects start to take hold, as McLuhan noted “Obsolescence is the moment of superabundance.”¹¹¹ The obsolescence of offline relevance, coincides with cultural trends in fetishizing the real, the authentic, the locally sourced, the vintage as well as self-documentation in social media, as evidence of having done something offline.

The shift back from a literate culture to an oral culture is currently being discussed because of new trends in communication such as digital narratives¹¹² and spoken-written¹¹³ communication, which have changed linguistic structures¹¹⁴ and introduced new forms of communication.¹¹⁵ In many forms of computer mediated communication computer users are disembodied – as there is no information in the corporeal sense, and so, meaning must be constructed¹¹⁶ and identity information must be performed within the context of the virtual environment. Unlike in the offline world or “real life”, computer mediated communication cannot rely on multimodal¹¹⁷ communication, as in many cases where visual communication, tone of speech, nuances, instant visual feedback and other contextual information is missing.

110 E. McLuhan, P. Zhang, *Pivotal Terms in Media Ecology: A Dialogue. – et Cetera* 2012, 69, 3, pp. 246–276, http://www.academia.edu/2031262/Pivotal_Terms_in_Media_Ecology_with_Eric_McLuhan_ (accessed 8 April 2015).

111 M. McLuhan, D. Carson, *The Book of Probes*. Eds. E. McLuhan and W. Kuhns. Corte Madera: Ginko Press, 2003.

112 R. Page, *Stories and Social Media*.

113 I. Kacandes, *Talk Fiction*.

114 J. Androutsopoulos, *Introduction: Sociolinguistics and Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication*.

115 W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

116 R. Page, *Interactivity and Interaction*.

117 R. Page, *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality*. London, New York: Routledge, 2009.

Miscommunication online can be the outcome of missing visual and aural information, as without visual or verbal feedback the detection of nuances is much more difficult.¹¹⁸ One of the new forms of communicating emotional nuance or meaning in text (that can be interpreted as an attempt at making up for this loss of oral/aural and visual communication) is the emoticon (emotional icon), such as the smiley face. Though there are continuous units of culture, such as identity narratives and storytelling¹¹⁹, the way this information can be shared is greatly influenced by the medium itself. In the digital environment there are different forms of temporal and spatial ordering¹²⁰, identity communication and linguistic adaptations, which have resulted in changes in written communication, such as spoken-written text and emoticons.

In the history of mass communication the effects of technology can be observed as changing not just modes of communication themselves, but more importantly communication mediums are seen as a catalyst for significant cultural and social shifts. A landmark moment in technological and communication history is the invention of the Gutenberg printing press in 1436, which is credited with directly causing the Protestant Reformation and The Renaissance in early-modern Europe.¹²¹ The Gutenberg press brought about the printing revolution and a new era of long-distance collapsing, globe-shrinking, mass-media technologies.¹²² Other communication technologies as “agents of change”¹²³ followed with their own inventory of effects, like the telegraph, radio, television, personal computer and the Internet. Once a new technology is introduced and implemented into our daily lives and ways of thinking, communicating and existing, there is no way it can be removed, as it will feel like a natural right and “the way things always were”.¹²⁴

118 d. boyd, M. Chang, E. Goodman, Representations of Digital Identity, <http://www.danah.org/papers/CSCW2004Workshop.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2015).

119 J. Brockmeier, D. Carbaugh, Narrative and Identity.

120 C. Hine, Virtual Ethnography.

121 E. Eisenstein, The Printing Press...

122 M. McLuhan, Understanding Media.

123 E. Eisenstein, The Printing Press...

124 N. Postman, Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change.

This instant, unquestioning adaption to any new communication technology that comes on the market is a side product of our technologically determinist culture that equates science and technology with evolution and progress, not just another consumer product. It is therefore, a deviation from the norm, or mainstream discourse to engage in a critical analysis and discussion of the tools of communication, work and entertainment that we interact with on a daily and, for some even hourly basis. The mere questioning of media effects can come across as reactionary, idiosyncratic, banal or even worse a type of technophobia or neo-luddism.¹²⁵ A critical analysis of our relationship with technology, however, would help to balance out a culture that arguably puts too much emphasis on electronic gadgetry and the promise of progress in the hands of commercial interest. Publicly owned news media outlets report on Apple's newest products, and have Facebook and Twitter pages (keep in mind these are private corporations) which blurs the lines even more between what is a private business and what is a public information medium and how this affects objectivity.

Social media websites such as Facebook or Twitter will urge users to share spontaneously, uninhibited, in order to "capture" candid moments of everyday human life. Facebook will try to encourage users to share often with prompts such as "What's happening, (user's name)?"¹²⁶ Walter Ong demonstrated how the move from a culture of oral/aural communication to a literate culture changed the way people communicate, while Walter Benjamin explored how taking a photograph did not just communicate a moment or snapshot, but essentially transforms the essence of a moment.¹²⁷ Both examples of writing down the spoken, and capturing a living moment in a still photograph frame¹²⁸ are seen as not only acts of preservation but also transformation.

Technological change has always brought about cultural re-ordering, as new experiences change the way we see the world around us and the way we see ourselves. Our information age

125 S. Turkle, *Alone Together*.

126 See , Figure 11.

127 W. Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

128 d. boyd, *Social Network Sites as Networked Publics*, pp. 39–58.

finds us hidden behind screens, creating online profiles to interact with others online, creating relevance offline, and using the tools that we have in front of us to improve our lives. What we often forget is that technological change is a Faustian bargain, for every advantage there is a disadvantage.¹²⁹ What we must also consider when discussing media effects, is the way our tools use us.

129 N. Postman, *Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change*.

2. Discourses in Digital Culture Research¹³⁰

2.1. Abstract

The study of digital culture is a multi-disciplinary field that spans many different methods, frameworks and philosophies that explore the relationship between culture and technology. The following follows the current discourse in digital culture research using the philosophy of scientific revolutions¹³¹ as a key source for understanding the current state of the emerging field.

2.2. Information Revolution, Scientific Revolution

Electronic technology that developed out of the 20th century, enabled the cultural prevalence of mass media, in the form of cinema and television and later digital media which provides cultural researchers and philosophers complex new frontiers to explore. Marshall McLuhan in "The Gutenberg Galaxy"¹³² and Martin Heidegger in "The Question Concerning Technology"¹³³ discuss the idea of media and technology as an extension of mankind that creates new capacity and influence, both intended and unintended, and have sought to understand them in a cultural as well as philosophical context. A core philosophical problem of technology is that, much as language transforms the world, so do the extensions of man, resulting in a change of meaning. Ernst

130 S. Koosel, *Kunstgeschichte*, Art History Open Peer Reviewed Journal, 2011, http://www.kunstgeschichte-ejournal.net/172/1/Stacey%2BKoosel_Discourses%2Bin%2BDigital%2BCulture%2BResearch.pdf.

131 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Third Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

132 M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

133 M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. New York: Harper and Row, 1977, p. 8.

Cassirer saw technology as an attempt at making sense of the world through symbolism and creating meaning through spontaneous action.¹³⁴ In the digital context, this changing of meaning is profound and reaches far into everyday life from the creation of online communities to digital identities that function as citizens of the global village, effectively changing the way we identify with ourselves and the world around us. As McLuhan predicted, the digital age has brought about electronic interdependence and a change in cognitive and social organisation including the transformation of media structures, modes of communication and identity narratives.

The phenomenon of digital culture is a relatively new technological and cultural development that has created a new field of study. Digital culture derives from technological developments in interactive media such as the Internet and web-platforms that enable Internet users to create online communities, relationships and digital identity construction and performance.¹³⁵ The study of digital culture is not limited to online analysis, but also factors in the offline user and the cultural environment. There is little synthesis (as yet), however, between methodological approaches and discourses of digital culture and digital identity research. There is no single and consistent discourse or body of ideas just as there is no single methodology that can always be depended on for an effective research tool.¹³⁶ Digital culture is being studied in a plethora of different fields with methodologies deriving from art and philosophy, computer science, the humanities and social sciences e.g., ethnography (Christine Hine),¹³⁷ psychology (Sherry Turkle),¹³⁸ cultural anthropology (Michael Wesch),¹³⁹ media

134 H. Ruin, *Technology as Destiny* in Cassirer and Heidegger.

135 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

136 J. Bignell, *Media Semiotics: An Introduction: Second Edition*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002.

137 C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*.

138 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

139 M. Wesch, *From Knowledgeable to Knowledge-able: Learning in New Media Environments*. – Academic Commons 7 January 2009. <http://www.academiccommons.org/2014/09/09/from-knowledgable-to-knowledge-able-learning-in-new-media-environments> (accessed 8 April 2015).

semiotics (Jonathan Bignell),¹⁴⁰ digital narratives (Ruth Page)¹⁴¹ and socio-linguistics (Jannis Androutsopoulos).¹⁴²

This multifarious situation has its strengths and weaknesses. There are such a variety of approaches that sometimes confusion can result. On the other hand, the digital cultural analyst must recognise the limitations of any particular discursive framework. When there is no standard set of methods, phenomena or common body of belief to take for granted, researchers are forced to build their field “anew from its foundation”.¹⁴³ Researchers in the field of digital culture can define their questions, tasks and objects of study to best suit their research subject.¹⁴⁴ Questions such as “Is digital culture a cultural anomaly?”, “Is it possible to pin down this new phenomena of the digital revolution and information age in a way which will lead to a scientific revolution?”¹⁴⁵. Has the scientific revolution already happened with the emerging and increasingly in-demand field of digital humanities? What methodological practices are best used in the analysis of digital culture? In this essay I will discuss the philosophical and methodological problems that I have encountered in my research on digital culture and digital identity narratives.

The current state of the study of digital culture shows many signs of a science in its early developmental stages – a science that has yet to build up a system of established methodological frameworks and a universally accepted paradigm. Thomas S. Kuhn, in “The Structure of Scientific Revolution”,¹⁴⁶ a seminal work on the philosophy of science, defines a fully developed science as one in which all fields have evolved to build established methodological frameworks and universally accepted paradigm. Stinchcombe

140 J. Bignell, *Media Semiotics*.

141 R. Page, *New Perspectives on Narrative...*

142 J. Androutsopoulos, *Introduction: Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication*.

143 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 13.

144 J. Bignell, *Media Semiotics*.

145 Scientific revolution as defined by Kuhn is when “...the communities rejection of one time-honored scientific theory in favor of another incompatible with it.” T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 13.

146 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

and Becker further define Kuhn's idea of "paradigm" as "examples of the virtues scientific work might have, in a combination that shows what work should look like in order to contribute to the discipline".¹⁴⁷

It would appear, however, that digital culture is potentially on track for its first universally received paradigm. An influential figure that has set a precedent for how digital communities and digital identity can be researched is MIT professor Sherry Turkle, who first wrote about digital culture and digital identity play in 1995. Turkle conducted psychoanalytical interviews, observed and analysed online communities with the pioneers of digital culture who existed on the pre-Internet, ARPANET¹⁴⁸ MUD's (multi-user dungeons) which were text-based, online communities that first engaged in digital identity play in 1975.¹⁴⁹ An interesting change in digital identity construction in online community and digital identity creation between then and now is the amount of factual information (real life facts) as opposed to fantasy-based and fictional information. Turkle explains how multi-user dungeons were themselves fantasy scenarios that gave people the opportunity to radically play with their identity.

In addition to virtual cross-dressing and creating character descriptions that deconstruct gender, MUDders gender-swap as double agents. That is, in MUDs, men play women pretending to be men, and women play men pretending to be women. Shakespeare's characters play these games as well.¹⁵⁰

Turkle discovered that the "MUDders" play with identity had therapeutic benefits with regard to building social confidence and discovering different aspects of themselves.

Online personae have something in common with the self that emerges in a psychoanalytic encounter. It, too, is significantly

147 H. S. Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*, p. 138.

148 The Advanced Research Projects Agency Network.

149 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

150 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, p. 215.

virtual, constructed within the space of the analysis, where its slightest shifts can come under the most intense scrutiny.”¹⁵¹

The MUD communities and identities that played with online environments, communities, identities and relationships are in stark contrast to the social media platforms of today such as Facebook that base themselves on the premise of sharing factual, real information from the user. These platforms are driven, at least in part, by the lucrative industry of gathering and selling personal information on the Internet known as data mining. Data gathering and mining is used by many online businesses and is itself an emerging interdisciplinary field of computer science. The emerging field of data mining has been defined by Han and Kamber as:

Data mining is the task of discovering interesting patterns from large amounts of data, where the data can be stored in databases, data warehouses or other information repositories. It is a young interdisciplinary field, drawing from areas such as systems, data warehousing, statistics, machine learning, data-visualization, information retrieval, and high performance computing.¹⁵²

The early developmental stages of a discipline are also characterised, according to Kuhn by “continual competition between a number of distinct views of nature, each partially derived from, and all roughly compatible with the dictates of scientific observation and method”.¹⁵³ An example of competing methodological practices that use very different approaches to the same issue in digital culture is the search for meaning through analysis of the online text itself versus the analysis of how individuals interact with and create online text. The analysis of the digital media text or cultural artefact is usually studied within a semiotic, literary and linguistic, structuralist framework. The study, however, of the individual who creates and participates in digital culture (for

151 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, p. 256.

152 J. Han, M. Kamber, *Data Mining Concepts and Techniques*. Morgan Kaufmann: San Francisco, 2006, p.39.

153 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 4.

example the creation of digital identity narratives, sharing stories about the self) is often carried out using a psychoanalytic profile of the author of the text (pioneered by Sherry Turkle)¹⁵⁴ and the field of cyber-psychology, anthropology and ethnography. These approaches are similar to the idea of multiaccentuality in media semiotics, as Bignell explains:

It is tempting to assume that individual users of the media, simply because they are all different and belong to different sub-cultural groups in society, can subvert the meanings of media texts in ways that some audience researchers and other academic critics would like to value as radical or even revolutionary. This optimistic view is important because it challenges the assumptions of structuralist semiotic research that posits that fixed meanings are structured into texts and signs by universally known codes and a fixed repertoire of positioning the audience. It does not, however, challenge the more recent semiotic approach ...which assumes that signs and texts have several meanings at once (polysemy), a kind of excess of proliferation of meanings which enables them to be used by audiences in different ways (multiaccentuality).¹⁵⁵

It may be too simplistic to define one analytical method as structuralist and the other as post-structuralist, as the particular paradigm and methods used by a practitioner within their field are not heterogeneous or static and there is a lot of overlap e.g., structuralism in psychology and post-structural media semiotics. Contemporary interactive media and media audiences, such as social media websites and social media users can give the impression that meaning is created individually and on the users own terms, referred to by media semioticians as a multiaccentuality of signs.

154 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

155 J. Bignell, *Media Semiotics*, p. 224.

2.3. Methodological and Philosophical Problems

Analytical methods for studying digital culture are constantly adapting to accommodate the changing demands of digital media texts and cultural artefacts. As the study of digital culture is in its early stages, researchers in the field struggle with using shared terms and concepts in addition to research methods, scientific structure or agreed upon paradigms. The term “digital culture” refers not only to the study of information age culture and the sociology of the Internet, the same term is also used for very different fields of study under the umbrella term, “digital humanities”, which lumps together research in any field of the humanities with computers and computing (not just the Internet and computer networks). “Digital heritage”, meanwhile, deals with museums, libraries and archives, digitizing information and creating meta-data using computer technology for information presentation, storage and analysis.

There is a difference, however, between computer scientists and social scientists, sometimes referred to as “digital humanists”. “This has led to some difficulties in communication that have not yet been fully resolved. By and large, those doing informatics have not had practical humanities backgrounds (there are, of course, exceptions to this) and humanists, to a large extent, have used computers only for word processing and e-mail.”¹⁵⁶ The confusion arising from using the term “digital culture” to refer to completely different areas of research is only the tip of an iceberg of problems. “Everyone working within the new paradigm is marginal because there is not yet an established discipline and more mainstream sensibilities have usually been drawn to less chaotic intellectual fields.”¹⁵⁷

The information age has triggered many innovative research methods and perspectives to develop theories, critiques and

156 J. Unsworth, *Scholarly Primitives: what methods do humanities researchers have in common, and how might our tools reflect this?* – Paper on Symposium “Humanities Computing: Formal Methods, Experimental Practice”, 13 May 2000, London, Kings College.

157 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, p.157.

understandings of digital culture. New developments have been made in many different established fields to respond to the changing context of media use and cultural transformation. What was once studied and understood as the media producer and the media consumer (or audience) is no longer applicable following the introduction of Web 2.0 (user created Internet content). Interactive and social web-platforms have turned the once passive media audience into active media producers themselves.¹⁵⁸ According to Nietzsche, human beings have always had an innate need to leave their mark, to communicate or celebrate their existence. This need is much like the impulse in the creation of art and continuation of life.¹⁵⁹

The idea of digital diasporas is often explored in the study of digital culture as a migration of meaning, with the shift in social meaning and understanding from the offline world to the online world. Social constructs such as community and self, narratives and language, media producers and consumers have all been explored in their primary offline meaning, then, in a secondary online meaning, to analyse particular aspects of the digital environment.

The empirical analysis of meaning in cultural sciences has long had an assortment of approaches including the phenomenological, linguistic and hermeneutic and various forms of functionalism.¹⁶⁰ Using the phenomenological approach to study digital culture and digital identity works well where digital artefacts are in an open and unrestricted observable place e.g., any web page that is in the public domain. Virtual, visual and media ethnographers who have studied the content of the Internet from a phenomenological approach have adapted their approach from traditional ethnographic field study methods. As virtual ethnographers, they are aware of the influence of preconditioned beliefs that effect both the use, analysis and interpretation of the use of technology. Virtual ethnography builds a potential foundation for the study of digital culture both in the offline and online context. As Christine

158 D. Gauntlett, *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 2002.

159 D. Gauntlett, *Creative Explorations: New Approaches to Identities and Audiences*. New York: Routledge Press, 2007.

160 J. Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*. Oxford: Polity Press, 1998.

Hine explained: "Beliefs about the Internet may have important consequences for the ways in which we relate to the technology and one another through it. Ethnography can therefore be used to develop an enriched sense of the meaning of the technology and the cultures which enable it and are enabled by it."¹⁶¹ As there are many different and distinct ways of viewing online culture in the first place (particularly in multi-disciplinary methodological analysis) it is beneficial to outline the essence of the belief.

Heidegger said "the essence of modern technology is by no means anything technological...it is technology itself that makes the demand on us to think in another way".¹⁶² This belief about the relationship between technology and culture was very similar to the interpretations of the impact of technology on culture as understood by Ernst Cassirer and Marshall McLuhan. As McLuhan noted: "The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the change in sense perception."¹⁶³ McLuhan regarded the electronic environment as almost impossible to see or recognize while at the same time all engulfing and affecting, producing a kind of hypnotic trance that inhibits people from realising their dependence on their tools and prevents them from seeing that technology changes the way we view the world around us, as well as ourselves.

The reason why we choose to ignore the influence of our technology, McLuhan speculates, may be because of the extent that the "electronic environment" transforms our experience that can be an inconvenient and uncomfortable truth. As Heim explains what Heidegger meant about the essence or influence of technology:

What Heidegger called "the essence of technology" infiltrates human existence more intimately than anything human could do. The danger of technology lies in the fundamental distortion

161 C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, p.8.

162 M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, p.8.

163 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p.19.

of human actions and aspirations. Not that machines can run amok, nor even that we might misunderstand ourselves through a faulty comparison with machines. Instead, technology enters the inmost recesses of human existence, transforming the way we know and think and will.¹⁶⁴

It is interesting to note that McLuhan and Heidegger did not live in the information age or information society¹⁶⁵ and yet were observant enough of their own technological and cultural landscape to predict trends and the extent to which technology would infiltrate everyday life in the future.

The need for methodological frameworks, research paradigms and method itself may be an anachronism in the digital age and philosophy has put up many good anarchistic arguments in the case against method. Paul Feyerabend, in “Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge”, challenges the idea that scientific method is superior to any other form of knowledge.¹⁶⁶ As Chalmers explains, “From this humanitarian point of view, Feyerabend supports his anarchistic account of science on the grounds that it increases the freedom of scientists by removing them from methodological constraints and, more generally, leaves individuals the freedom to choose between science and other forms of knowledge.”¹⁶⁷

164 M. Heim, *The Computer As Component: Heidegger And McLuhan*. – *Philosophy and Literature* 1992, 16, p. 309.

165 Explored by Manuell Castells in “The Information Age” trilogy: M. Castells, *End of Millennium*. Malden: Blackwell, 1998. M. Castells, *The Power of Identity*. Malden: Blackwell, 1997. M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*. Malden: Blackwell, 1996.

166 A. F. Chalmers, *What Is This Thing Called Science?*.

167 A. F. Chalmers, *What Is This Thing Called Science?*, p. 156.

2.4. An Interdisciplinary Comparison Study of Digital Identity Narratives

Digital identity defined simply as an assumed online identity can be seen as the manipulation of a kaleidoscope of selves tailored to fit into different environments and roles online.¹⁶⁸ The timeless, pan-cultural idea of the story and the story teller are intertwined in digital identity narratives, where the storyteller may be the story itself.¹⁶⁹ Discourse analyses of digital identity narratives can put the text into context, both in micro-context (the online environment and digital culture) and macro-context (what is happening in the offline world).

Digital identity narratives can be ephemeral – more similar in time and space to spoken conversation than written communication, traditional storytelling and literature genres.

Following McLuhan, Meyrowitz says electronic media recalls simultaneity a key aspect of oral societies – action, perception and reaction again become prime forms of communication. But this electronic aurality is far different from that of old because it is not limited physically to time and space. The impression of experiencing distant events fosters a decline in power-instigated, print-supported, implicit hierarchies, thus imploding social structures.¹⁷⁰

The written form of communication used online has been referred to as “spoken written communication”¹⁷¹ or “secondary orality”¹⁷² and has been explored by socio-linguists and digital narrative researchers such as Ruth Page in her work “Interactivity and

168 A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories, Interactions and Identities*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007.

169 J. Brockmeier, R. Harre, *Narrative: Problems and promises of an alternative paradigm*. – *Research on Language Interaction* 1997, Volume 30, Issue 4, pp. 263–283.

170 M. Hunter, *McLuhan’s Pendulum: Reading Dialectics of Technological Distance*. – *Shaping Technologies: Sarai Reader* 2003, #3, p. 148.

171 I. Kacandes, *Talk Fiction*.

172 W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

Interaction: Text and Talk in Online Communities”¹⁷³ and Jannis K. Androutsopoulos in “Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication”.¹⁷⁴

Three commonly used methods to study the online phenomena of digital identity narratives are: Cyberpsychology (the psychology of the Internet user), Literary analysis of digital identity narratives (including socio-linguistic), Virtual ethnography (and digital anthropology) for context building. Each has its own paradigms and findings that may gain greater dimension and meaning when used in a comparative study. I have, in the past, found different methods useful to answer basic questions about digital identity narratives, questions such as “Why is the story being told?”, “What is being said?”, “Who is telling the story?” and “Where is it being said?” The question of why a particular digital narrative or text exists on the Internet is one of motivation – why did the Internet user feel compelled to write this particular text or create this particular digital artefact?¹⁷⁵ The search for motivation behind human actions is well documented in psychology and psychoanalysis. Cyber-psychologists currently studying digital culture often use questionnaires and interviews of Internet users (of a particular website or social network) to ask the Internet user why they do what they do online.

The motivation of the Internet user, however, may just be a small part of the puzzle in the analysis of digital culture, which, when put into the context of both the online environment and the offline information era, can help build a paradigm or scientific revolution in the study of digital culture. It’s important to remember though that scientific revolutions don’t happen over night, rather these revolutions happen slowly by many people working together to develop new ways of investigating problems.¹⁷⁶

173 R. Page, *Interactivity and Interaction*.

174 J. Androutsopoulos, *Introduction: Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication*.

175 Digital artifacts (also called virtual artifacts) and digital narratives are not just literary text but can include photographs, videos, music and any variation thereof in multi-media. However for the purpose of my study I have chosen a specific genre of digital identity narratives expressed through text and online journals (blogs).

176 H. S. Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*.

Three particular research methods were selected because they seemingly answer basic questions about digital identity narratives. Digital identity narratives is an online phenomena where story and storyteller merge even though the analysis of the text versus the analysis of the creator of the text may yield different interpretations. Although there are many other fields of research that deal with similar problems and use different terms, psychology, socio-linguistics and ethnography have all successfully expanded their research paradigms and methods to fill the current research voids and knowledge gaps in the culture of the digital age. By comparing three different ways that digital identity narratives are studied, a methodological framework might be created that will enable a more holistic and multi-dimensional interpretation of modern cultural artefacts that exist as a part of digital culture and perhaps be a small part of a larger movement to analyse and understand the modern day phenomena of digital culture.

3. Digital Identity Narratives¹⁷⁷

The proliferation of social media has led to an abundance of self-expression online in the form of identity narratives. The online cultural phenomena of digital identity has been explored using many different methods, one of these methods is through the analysis of digital narratives.¹⁷⁸ “Digital identity narratives” is a term used to analyze identity narratives that are presented on social media platforms such as weblogs and social networking websites.

Two originally conflicting methodological practices used to study identity narratives are psychology and literary theory.¹⁷⁹ These approaches have been reconciled, through interdisciplinary research, and as a result transformed into complementing methods for researching digital identity narratives.¹⁸⁰ The micro-context of a digital identity narrative validates the use of a psychological approach, whereas literary theory is best suited for the sociolinguistic interpretation of the text and the online cultural environment – the macro-context. Using such a two-folded approach we can perhaps understand more about the motivation and meaning behind the cultural phenomena of digital identity narratives.

177 S. Koosel, *MiT7 Unstable Platforms: the promise and peril of transition*. Conference paper, MIT, Cambridge, 13.–15. V 2011, <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit7/papers/Koosel%20Mit7.pdf>.

178 R. Page, *Interactivity and Interaction*.

179 J. Brockmeier, D. Carbaugh, *Narrative and Identity*.

180 M. Bortolucci, P. Dixon, *Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

3.1. Digital Identity + Identity Narratives

We construct and understand the world around us through narratives. Telling stories is possibly our earliest form of entertainment, from oral storytelling traditions and pictographs on cave walls, right up to the information age with social media platforms and mobile technological devices. The medium that stories have been communicated through is constantly evolving, but are the stories themselves changing? Despite technological advances, are the story and the storyteller anchored as a constant and continual unit of culture? Digital identity narratives, are the stories we tell digitally about ourselves and our world. The term fuses together the established idea of digital identities, as the individual component of digital culture – the citizen of the global village so to speak and identity narratives, which analyze how we tell stories about ourselves. The study of digital identity narratives much like digital storytelling itself, is an interdisciplinary field which combines the methodologies of cultural anthropology, ethnography, sociology, psychology, literary criticism and socio-linguistic. Narrative study has long explored themes of identity as both a personal and cultural construction, and an expression of a particular place and time in history.

Not many questions in Western literature and thought have a longer, deeper and livelier intellectual history than how we give meaning to our lives – and how, in doing so, we construct ourselves as Gestalten in time, as personal and cultural beings. But this question is newly alive today, for modern scholarship in various disciplines has brought new challenging perspectives to our understanding of human identity construction. These are the perspectives of narrative study.¹⁸¹

Both “identity” and “narrative” have been the subject of long traditions of intellectual curiosity, research and discussion. Although the two research fields have not always been congruent

181 J. Brockmeier, D. Carbaugh, *Narrative and Identity*.

and connected, as the study of identity has been explored using different methodological tools of investigation than the study of narratives. Identity has been investigated in the fields of psychology and sociology, and narratives have long been the domain of literature and literary theory. Psychology and literary criticism although both engaged in research of the same topic (identity narratives) have fundamental differences in their paradigm of human nature. Literary critic Daniel Albright (1996) said that "Literature is a wilderness and psychology is a garden",¹⁸² and went on to explain how psychology is domestic and methodologically rigid where as literature can more easily deal with the "irregularities and deformities"¹⁸³ of undomesticated nature.

This notion of separation or fragmentation¹⁸⁴ is an idea that has been well explored in post-modern philosophies, rhetoric and discourse analysis and can easily be applied to current understandings of identity and self-representation.¹⁸⁵ "By the mid-twentieth century, the idea of a fixed personality based on a stable mentality became increasingly untenable and the counter idea, of identity or subjectivity being an asset to be groomed and presented to best effect, has gained acceptance."¹⁸⁶ Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor is that everyday life is an identity performance, which is fashioned specifically to the context of the stage and feedback loop of the audience.¹⁸⁷ This feedback loop is demonstrated in web-logs (blogs) where readers can leave feedback in the form of comments and also in social networking sites such as Facebook with comments, writing on walls and the "like" button. Although Roland Barthes wrote about the "Death of the Author" and post-structuralists provided many good arguments for why a written work and the biographical information or intention of the author is not relevant in the analysis

182 U. Neisser, R. Fivush, *The Remembering Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511752858.004> (accessed 8 April 2015).

183 J. Brockmeier, D. Carbaugh, *Narrative and Identity*, p. 2.

184 A. Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity*.

185 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

186 J. Finkelstein, *The Art of Self Invention: Image and Identity in Popular Visual Culture*. London: I.B.Tauris, 2007, p. 3.

187 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

of a literary text,¹⁸⁸ in many cases of written works on the Internet, the authors' intention is everything. For example, if a weblog author does not like the comments left by the audience/readers, the author/blogger has many courses of option at hand. The blogger can correct the text, add additional information, defend it or delete it within an instant. Some bloggers may strive for crowd pleasing, where others may intentionally be instigators for outrage.

3.2. Changing Storyteller, Changing Language

Marshall McLuhan understood how much of an effect the electronic environment has on every facet of our everyday life. In the Gutenberg Galaxy, McLuhan explained how the Global Village would be brought about by an electronic interdependence created by electronic media. In the Global Village there would be a return to tribal existence, as opposed to the more individualistic and fragmented life of the literary man from the previous communication revolution.¹⁸⁹ McLuhan's ideas was that there would be a shift from literary man to tribal-integral man, visual culture would be replaced with oral culture and the need for privacy would be replaced with the need for community or tribe. Digital culture itself can be seen as online communities and online tribes, which share stories, values, collective identities and site specific established social conventions (netiquette).¹⁹⁰

Following McLuhan, Meyrowitz says electronic media recalls simultaneity, a key aspect of oral societies – action, perception and reaction again become prime forms of communication. Only this electronic aurality is far different from that of old; it is not limited physically to time and space. The impression of experiencing distant events fosters a decline in power-instigated, print-supported, implicit hierarchies, thus imploding social structures.¹⁹¹

188 R. Barthes, *Image Music Text*. London: Fontana Press, 1977.

189 M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

190 C. Thurlow, L. Lengel, A. Tomic, *Computer Mediated Communication*.

191 M. Hunter, *McLuhan's Pendulum*, pp. 144–156.

In many ways digital identity narratives have more in common with spoken conversation rather than written communication and literature genres. The changing written form of communication used online has been referred to as “spoken written communication” (Irene Kacandes)¹⁹² or “secondary orality” (Walter Ong)¹⁹³ which is explored by sociolinguists and digital narrative researchers such as Ruth Page in her work on “Interactivity and Interaction: Text and Talk in Online Communities”¹⁹⁴ and Jannis K. Androutsopoulos in “Sociolinguistics and Computer Mediated Communication”.¹⁹⁵ Sociolinguists research the relationship between identity, language and discourse, and have experienced revolutions in their field as previous models of the relationship between identity, linguistics and social variables have been challenged by new approaches.¹⁹⁶ The narrative structure of online communication is an interesting field for sociolinguists as digital culture has developed unique vernaculars, languages that were perhaps influenced and created by the technological environment itself. Much like William Labov studied the African American English vernacular and in doing so developed the methodology for sociolinguists,¹⁹⁷ so studying the vernacular used in online communities could help develop a framework or methodology for studying digital ethnography, digital culture and digital identity narratives.

The distinctive and indissolubly “spoken-written” qualities of online discourse present a fresh challenge for exploring the modal resource of narrative. The convergence that typifies secondary orality means that the qualities of the literate and oral modes cannot be isolated from each other, nor can the analysis of narratives that emerge from this participatory

192 I. Kacandes, *Talk Fiction*.

193 W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

194 R. Page, *Interactivity and Interaction*.

195 J. Androutsopoulos, *Introduction: Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication*.

196 *Discourse and identity*.

197 W. Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, pp. 354–96.

culture rely on models derived from exclusively written or spoken paradigms.¹⁹⁸

In computer mediated communication (CMC), identity performances are disembodied, but constructed instead within the context of the virtual environment. Unlike in the offline world, where information is communicated not only through text and speech, but also through tone of speech and visual communication (multi-modal communication), the online world has lost a few of those important senses. Miscommunication can be an outcome of the missing information, as without visual or verbal feedback the detection of nuances is much more difficult.¹⁹⁹ The replacement of face to face communication with computer mediated communication has changed the written language, and introduced symbols used to communicate emotions. This has resulted in a convergence of spoken and written communication, on mobile phones with text messaging, instant messaging as well as other communication platforms where typographic symbols are used in new ways to express emotion within the text.

The “smiley face” and what are referred to as emoticons (emotional icons) are commonly used in interactive digital media. The smiley face was invented by Scott E. Fahlman at 11.44 on the 19th of September 1982, the entire transcript of the online discussion on a Carnegie Mellon University computer science general board is available online.²⁰⁰ The computer science board (an online discussion forum) were trying to come up with different ways to let others know that they were joking, and were proposing different typographical marks to indicate to others the intended emotion behind the typed text. This need for non-verbal communication, such as facial emotions and the use of body language to tell a story reveals the nature of online communication. “Since emoticons may serve as nonverbal surrogates, suggestive of facial expression, they may add a paralinguistic component to a

198 R. Page, *Interactivity and Interaction*, p. 208.

199 d. boyd, M. Chang, E. Goodman, *Representations of Digital Identity*.

200 S. E. Fahlman, *Smiley Lore :-)* <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~sef/sefSmiley.htm> (accessed 8 April 2015).

message... The fact that emoticons are used implies that individuals at least feel the need to express some of their emotions with short symbols rather than text.”²⁰¹ The new medium created a need for a different kind of communication, yet in 1982 computer technology was far from a multi-media environment that it is today. Almost 30 years later, despite technological advances, which have incorporated sound and images into the online environment – we are still using emoticons in text to express ourselves. What is it about the online environment and digital culture that created this playful or emotional need? Early criticism of computer mediated communication with the opinion that CMC’s are a cold and impersonal medium, has been challenged by new studies on the use of emoticons in online environments.²⁰²

Our conclusion is that emotions are abundant in CMC, and there is no indication that CMC is an impersonal medium. This can first of all be inferred from the success of MSN, the presence of blogs and support lists, and the success of online therapy, in all of which emotions about a variety of personal experiences and problems are shared. The analyses of these messages, although not always focused on the communication or expression of specific emotions, clearly show that emotions are communicated, whether more implicitly or more explicitly.²⁰³

This “spoken-written” text²⁰⁴ has interesting characteristic that have developed online, which possibly stem from the same root as the need for emoticons, the use of symbols instead of expressing emotion through text. What did the online environment provide that created a new need to inject emotion and traits that are common in oral culture and storytelling into text based communication? Was it a more familiar environment, more relaxed, interpersonal and

201 D. Derks, Exploring the missing wink: emoticons in cyberspace. Open University Netherlands, 2007, p. 29, <http://www.ou.nl/Docs/Onderzoek/Definitieve%20versie%20Exploring%20the%20Missing%20Wink.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2015).

202 D. Derks, Exploring the missing wink, p. 29.

203 D. Derks, Exploring the missing wink, p. 31.

204 R. Page, Interactivity and Interaction.

interactive than the traditional letter, fax or telephone communication in which text can be “set up” in a greater context? Was it the public aspect, where the text was being read by a larger (and possibly anonymous) audience who may not understand insider or personal senses of humour? Or was it the medium itself that forced people to find new ways to interact with each other? A basic and global human need is storytelling, which has evolved to a more diffused cultural background and a larger anonymous audience in the information age. Traditionally stories would be told to a known audience of similar cultural background. Every culture that we have known has been a storytelling culture, which makes storytelling possibly a pan-cultural form of defining generic human life.²⁰⁵

3.3. Small Stories of Everyday Life

The relationship between the online self and the offline self, in the case of digital identity narratives, can be explored through discourse analysis. Traditionally discourse analysis discusses the relation between discourse and interaction and the relation between text (discourse) and context. However discourse analysis much like narrative analysis is an umbrella term not a single unified approach, as the same term covers many different approaches used by researchers in this interdisciplinary field.²⁰⁶ Danah Boyd pointed out, online we have no identity information in the form of bodies in the corporeal sense – which obscures identity information, and to be able to exist in mediated contexts people must “write themselves into being” for example filling in profiles on social networking sites.²⁰⁷

205 J. Brockmeier, R. Harre, *Narrative: Problems and promises...*

206 B. Benwell, E. Stokoe, *Discourse and identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.

207 d. boyd, *Taken Out of Context, American Teen Sociality in Networked Publics*. Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 2008, p. 121.

As far as human affairs are concerned, it is above all through narrative that we make sense of the wider, more differentiated, and more complex texts and contexts of our experience. It is essentially this notion that has been both generalized and broadened as well as specified in a wide spectrum of inquiries that include studies on the ways we organize our memories, intentions, life histories, and ideas of our “selves” or “personal identities” in narrative patterns.²⁰⁸

Digital identities can be constructed out of text, images, sound, video and any other computer mediated means of conveying meaning from the author of the digital identity to others, and at times only to themselves. In many cases a digital identity may exist as a small blurb of text under the subheading of “Biography” or “About Me” (often used in social media platforms). Other times in less structured environment, or web-platforms with more flexible and less stringent design in how to communicate, such as commenting or blogging, a digital identity can be created and maintained by a single or series of small stories. The ideas of Alexandra Georgakopoulou in “Small stories, Interactions and Identities”²⁰⁹ and “Small Stories as New Perspective in Narrative and Identity Analysis”²¹⁰ lend themselves very well to the idea of digital identity and it’s modern versions of narrative, story teller and identity construction. “Our analysis has demonstrated how a careful reading of a strip of interactions as a “small story” can reveal aspects of identity construction that would have otherwise remained unnoticed.”²¹¹ Snippets of identity information shared on social media platforms such as “status updates” and “comments” on Facebook can be seen as small but significant parts of identity construction in social media.

The work of Erving Goffman has been essential in the study of digital identity, particularly “Self-Presentation of Everyday Life”.

208 J. Brockmeier, R. Harre, *Narrative: Problems and promises...*

209 A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories, Interactions and Identities*.

210 M. Bamberg, A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories as a New Perspective in Narrative and Identity Analysis*. – *Text & Talk* 2008, 28(3), pp. 377–396.

211 M. Bamberg, A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories as a New Perspective...*, p. 392.

Goffman's idea that social interaction and face to face interaction are framed as theatrical performances, with the metaphor of the self as a performer and life being a stage with the back stage symbolizing privacy and private lives and the front stage symbolizing the public and public actions, easily translate to the notion of the digital identity being a mode of performance or theatrics that utilise the online environment as a stage to perform. (Goffman, 1959) Georgakopoulou further expands Goffmans²¹² exploration of self as performer, storytelling and propagandist:

As Schiffrin (1990) has explicated it, drawing on Goffman, storytellers can present themselves in the capacity of (a) animator (the aspect of self which physically produces talk), (b) author (the aspect of self responsible for the content of talk), (c) figure, the main character in the story, someone who belongs to the world that is spoken about and not the world in which the speaking occurs, and, finally, (d) principal, the self established by what is said, committed to what is said...Through such manipulations of their kaleidoscope of selves, storytellers can diffuse their agency or responsibility in the social field, create a widened base of support for their views and beliefs, or, generally, cast positive light on them (e.g. see Hill 1995).²¹³

Much in the same way, a digital identity narrative can show how an author can "manipulate a kaleidoscope of selves"²¹⁴ to multi-function and fit into different environments and roles that have been outlined online. However, the internet as a networked public²¹⁵ complicates previous eras' understandings of what is public and private and what is front or back stage. Exploration of spatial and digital identities was neglected for a long time by identity researchers, and has only recently began to gain ground. Also the spatial and visual aspects of digital identities were at first ignored by identity researchers who focused on linguistics.

212 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

213 A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories, Interactions and Identities*, p.16.

214 A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories, Interactions and Identities*.

215 d. boyd, *Taken Out of Context*, p. 121.

A more holistic approach to explore digital identity construction, would use both visual and textual data and incorporate the spatial aspects such as time and place as well as the intentions of the author. By placing digital identity narratives in location, space and time, a greater context can be built which can explore both group and individual digital identity narrative practices.²¹⁶

216 B. Benwell, E. Stokoe, *Discourse and identity*.

4.

Exploring Digital Identity: Beyond the Private Public Paradox²¹⁷

4.1. Introduction: Defining Digital Identity

As new media is transforming culture, we transform ourselves into digital identities in the information age. Digital identities are who we say we are, when we are online. They can be a subtype of a public persona, an extension of our “true” selves, or they can be completely fabricated and fantastical, to function as a mask to hide the identity of an Internet user from rest of the world. A digital identity can spin intricate, interconnected webs utilising creative, social and interactive platforms that enable them to share and perform to an open or closed audience.²¹⁸ Both online identities and online communities are part of a virtual reality; simply put, a reality or existence that in most cases will only exist on the Internet and not “offline” in real life.

The phenomenon of the digital identity has been referred to by many different terms including: online identity, online personality, *digiSelf*, virtual identity, avatar and online persona. These terms all refer roughly to the same idea, of an individual using a computer and creating a new identity for themselves on the Internet. It is important to clarify that the online identity is not a computer user in the traditional sense of man operating a machine, nor does it refer to any significance in the human-machine interaction. The significant interaction of digital identities are human to human or more specifically online identities interacting with other online identities in a virtual environment. The computer and the Internet are merely the medium, the software on the websites provides

217 S. Koosel, *The Digital Turn: User’s Practices and Cultural Transformations*. Pille Runnel, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Piret Viires & Marin Laak (eds.). Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 154–166.

218 S. Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics*. London: Sage Publications, 1998.

a platform or stage²¹⁹ for online identities to perform or exist. Digital identities are the content of the Internet; they are the performers who draw in the audience, and inspire the passive audience to become more active, interactive and creative. Online existence in online communities and digital identities are merely web-mediated human interactions. With this new medium comes new cultures, new ways of presenting the self and interacting with others as well as interacting with the medium itself. Sometimes we represent ourselves online in narrative form, other times we can use visual images, videos, audio and music. There is no limit to how or within what parameters we can express or present ourselves online, as Federman explored the idea through the metaphor of *digiSelves*, each with their own autonomous existence.

What was once integral – our self, our person, our identity – is now split among our self in the physical world and our many *digiSelves*, each having an autonomous life of its own. Thus, we disconnect from the normal experience of physical and corporeal time and space when we live vicariously through our *digiSelf* on the Internet. This disconnection is significant and profound, as our consciousness becomes disconnected from our sensorium, extends in a real sense into the world's electronic nervous system and thereby creates the unique experience of separating our identity, or self, from our body.²²⁰

An individual can use an online identity to act as an extension of their offline identity, or they can use an online identity to mask and alter their offline identity and become someone or something else. This power of deciding what information to share and what information to withhold is a meaningful characteristic that the creator of a digital identity has online, and not in the real world. In real life it may prove more challenging to convince people that you are a different gender, age or species than it is on the Inter-

219 E. Goffman, *Stigma*.

220 M. Federman, *The Cultural Paradox of the Global Village*, <http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/CulturalParadoxOfTheGlobalVillage.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2015).

net.²²¹ The mask that the Internet user wears, can often be as simple as a pseudonym or “handle” instead of their real name. This new or hidden identity can act as a mask to protect the privacy of the user or simply be an act of self-expression and entertainment. Derrick de Kerckhove, the former director of the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto, predicted in 1995 that in the future “Changing our personal identity will become a primary entertainment, like a cosmetic surgery of the psyche.”²²² This prediction is particularly interesting, because not only does it foretell the Web 2.0²²³ revolution of user created Internet content, but all the creative platforms on the Internet that invite people to “create a new user”.

Identities that are created online simultaneously flaunt and hide information, leading to a private and public paradox in their online existence. This contradictory nature characterises digital identity and their carefully protected private and public spheres of existence that one is caught between when creating an online self. It is possible that this drive to experience informational self determination, by creating a digital identity, is an important aspect of modern life. The creation of a digital identity and the paradox of wanting privacy and publicity at the same time, is perhaps only a microcosm of the larger informational trends in society and culture today. With the rise of the surveillance or transparent society,²²⁴ citizens of democratic nations have experienced a dramatic shift in how easily rights regarding privacy can be taken away. Voyeurism has become not only a recurring theme in entertainment but social policy in the information age. The latest controversy regarding personal privacy violations are the x-ray scanners and increasingly “intimate” physical searches being used in airports where air travelers continue to be treated as criminal suspects.²²⁵

221 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

222 D. de Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture*, p. 20.

223 T. O'Reilly, *What Is Web 2.0*.

224 D. Brin, *The Transparent Society*.

225 R. Paul, *Are Air Travelers Criminal Suspects?* *The Daily Bell*, 23 November 2010, <http://www.thedailybell.com/editorials/1545/Ron-Paul-Are-Air-Travelers-Criminal-Suspects> (accessed 8 April 2015).

The world of interactive multi-media has been in rapid transformation in the last decade. The dawn of personal computers and the accessibility of the Internet has changed the way people interact with media and with each other.²²⁶ The Internet has provided new interactive platforms of communication that were not available before, with traditional forms of media such as television, radio and print-journalism. Marshall McLuhan, a communications theorist, philosopher and media guru, prophesied his visions of the future long before the world wide web existed. In McLuhan's iconic 1962 media analysis, "The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man" he introduced the idea of the "global village".²²⁷ The term global village described a phenomena in which the world would become more closely interconnected like a village, and where the movement of information would instantaneously transmit from one point of the earth to another. McLuhan predicted the global village would happen with the rise of electric technology and mass-media. The global village, is now used as a metaphor for the Internet, as the movement of information has become instantaneous, connecting the world and people to an intense degree that was not possible before. McLuhan predicted that this change in culture and communication would have far reaching and dangerous repercussions, including the shift from literate man and culture to tribal man and a culture in which privacy does not exist.

The virtual environment fulfills social and entertainment needs by providing the Internet user with a sense of self and community. The more active user may create a website or write in an online journal (blog), or they may choose to only share pictures or videos. More passive forms of digital identity expression may only comment on things others have created online. In creating a digital identity there is the self-aware need to be seen or heard, or simply to participate and be a part of something bigger, such as an online community. However in the paradoxical nature of digital identity existence, sharing their real identity and information

226 M. Castells, *The Power of Identity*.

227 M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

is often seen as potentially dangerous. This creates a situation in which the Internet user is simultaneously seeking publicity and privacy. The need for attention, the need to share and be a contributing part of the online community, must obviously at times outweigh the need for privacy. Creating an artificial identity can liberate the Internet user to provide or share select information, without feeling exposed or like their privacy has been invaded.

The privacy versus publicity aspect of digital identities can often lead to a very interesting paradox in which the user may want to be public or even seek fame yet has a strong desire to guard their privacy and real life identity at the same time. We are who we say we are online; any identity can be assumed, used or discarded. It can be suggested that online personalities will be greatly influenced by the online communities with which they associated themselves. Like a chameleon that changes colours to suit its background or settings, so the online personality can change to adapt and fit in to an online community, or in some cases to create a community of its own.²²⁸ A digital identity is a manifestation of a real life identity that exists on the world wide web, but it need not be a single identity. An individual can have numerous different digital identities to serve different purposes and needs. For example, on some websites a person may choose to use his or her real information, a second website might be slightly modified to thinly veil the identity, and a third digital identity could be a complete work of fiction.

4.2. Transcending Mediums

As McLuhan prophesised the current reality of the “global village”, an online identity can be likened to be the global village’s citizen or “netizen”. The birth of a digital identity can start as easily and simply as creating a name, account or handle to register on an Internet website, and can be as elaborate as an online existence that spans over many different websites, including a multi-media trail that

can include anything from photographs, text, videos, music and even live webcams. Some Internet users engage in electronic exhibitionism and strive to attract as much attention as possible, and become celebrities by the careful construction of an online identity. The real life identity of a digital identity can be kept completely separate and anonymous, even if the particular digital identity is well known on the Internet (Internet famous).

This selling of the “real life self” or “real life stories” online can be seen as the commodification of the individual. Selling what would otherwise be private human existence to the public as a form voyeuristic entertainment has been a popular subject of reality TV, websites and weblogs. Traditional celebrities or “stars” were made and marketed by businesses and institutions that had a vested financial or collective interest in making a particular individual well known to the public. However in the blogging era, an entire marketing team or appearances on traditional forms of media such as television, radio and newsprint are not needed to make a person on the Internet well known and famous enough to transcend mediums, from the virtual to the material. It is possible that a digital identity is not necessarily being commodified or being made into an object, as they are existing or performing to the Internet community of their own free will. However, the key difference between a human and objects when being sold as commodities is that a human is able to try to keep from being discarded.²²⁹

Transcending mediums is a term that I use to describe the phenomena when a digital identity whose existence was created on the Internet reaches a critical mass of popularity or potential commercial success on the Internet and is offered to continue their work in a more traditional and respected form of media, such as print journalism or television and with the change of medium comes a change of identity. For example, a blogger who has a very large dedicated fan base may be offered a book deal and become a best selling author. This is a goal for some bloggers, as it brings much more financial gain as well as “real world” fame. The very

229 K. Hillis, *Digital Sensations: Space, Identity and Embodiment in Virtual Reality*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 352.

important detail in the scenario that supports the theory of the private and public paradox of digital identities is the way authors will present themselves in traditional versus virtual media. On the blog of the very popular author, his or her name is nowhere – the blog is written anonymously or under a pseudonym.

When this blogger transcends mediums and becomes a best selling author, suddenly his or her name is on the dust jacket of the book, in print for all to see in newspapers and interviews on television. The blog readers finally discover the “true identity” of the author “behind” the blog. For most of the blog readers it will be the first time they can put a name and face (author) to the content they had been enjoying for years. What is it about the Internet that is deemed dangerous, untrustworthy, unestablished and not real – that the readers of a book or newspaper may be deemed a worthy enough audience to know the real name and face of the blogger but not the blog readers? Is it the perceived scale or value of the audience? Or is it the nature of the online environment and digital culture itself?

The exciting and interesting side product of studying digital identity is that in studying digital identity, we study the cultural artefacts that give us insight into the culture in which the creator belongs. To study digital identity as a cultural artefact and to be able to speculate on what the culture and environment is around the creation of this identity has a double reaching effect. Firstly a greater understanding and knowledge of digital culture, and secondly the next layer of understanding modern culture and the world around us. Studying digital identity is the key to understanding the values, stigmas and characteristics of the modern world.

When a digital identity creator transcends mediums, from the relatively new and unknown world of the Internet fame to the established, respectable, traditional form of media such as print journalism (newspapers and magazines) or printed publications (books) they have arrived as a real, published author who can share with the public their true identity. Perhaps it is the equal opportunity of the Internet that enables anyone to have a website or a blog, which degrades the status of blog writers to be anonymous or very loosely connected to their true offline identity.

The fact that one medium (the Internet) settles for a pseudo or fabricated identity and another medium (published print) requires a real name and identity is a very interesting clue to why digital identity exists in the first place. McLuhan exposed media environments as being invisible and pervasive, their rules, structures and patterns are not easily perceptible.²³⁰ It is possible that it is the medium itself that dictates how we present ourselves, the invisible yet socially accepted rules of the electronic environment in the case of digital identity.

4.3. Informational Self Determination

The information age gave people new ways to fulfill their basic human needs, to be connected to others, self-expression and to belong to a greater community. Interactive technology provided new dimensions of existence, shaping the new globalised world into a smaller accessible global village. Web 2.0, the creation of web platforms that enabled Internet users to carve out their own little pieces of the Internet and create their own terms of existence has set the stage for the creation of the digital identity. The important aspect of the digital identity that Web 2.0 platforms like Flickr and Facebook understand, is that digital identities want the right to informational self-determination. Though it is arguable how much power the digital identity truly has over their personal information on Web 2.0 platforms and how much is done to give the illusion of having control of their own information. Digital identities are created when users are given the right to decide what information is public and what information is private. This is acknowledged by the majority of Web 2.0 platforms, which offer a variety of privacy settings.

Informational self-determination can be defined as an individual's right to decide what information should be communicated to others and under what circumstances.²³¹ This term was originally

230 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

231 A. F. Westin, *Privacy and Freedom*. New York: Atheneum, 1967.

used to outline a new law structure that would give people the right to protect their own personal information in real life. With the relatively new existence of digital entities, with real life traits and information that may or may not exist in real life as well, the idea of informational self-determination is brought to a different level. Digital identities have more informational self-determination than the individual who created that digital identity has “offline” in the real world. This freedom of choice, to be selective or manipulative with information regarding the self, benchmarks a new era in human existence. A good illustrated example of digital identities and their informational self-determination was published on July 5th 1993 in “The New Yorker” magazine. A cartoon shows two dogs talking, one of them sitting behind a computer with his paws on the keyboard with the other dog sitting on the floor. The first dog is telling the second dog: “On the Internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.”²³² The recent update to the joke, and social comment on the current surveillance society we live in, is: “...but they know you buy dog food.”

4.4. Surveillance Society, Transparent Society

While concealing one’s identity might be easy to do online, it is a feeble defense against the predations of government and corporate power in real life. Though the digital identity might go to great extremes to protect their real identity when they are online, the real world they live in is becoming a surveillance society. With the belief that surveillance is synonymous with security, the world could enter an Orwellian dystopian existence overnight without any large public outcry or mourning for any loss of former civil liberties. The appetite for information and willingness to be monitored seems to characterise the modern world as an information society. Reality television is a popular form of voyeuristic entertainment, surveillance cameras do not bother citizens and many

232 R. Steiner, “On the Internet nobody knows you’re a dog” Cartoon, The New Yorker, 3 July 1993, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/on-the-internet-nobody-knows-youre-a-dog> (accessed 8 April 2015).

computers come with webcams as standard features, which begs the question: is the need for privacy history?

The rise of the surveillance society, would seem like a science fiction depiction of the future; however the surveillance society already arrived some time ago. The biggest Western surveillance society to date is the United Kingdom, with 4.2 million surveillance cameras (CCTV) installed and functioning in 2006, which is equal to one camera per fourteen people.²³³ There are of course, polar opposite views on whether the surveillance society is progressive or regressive. Many civil rights activists fear that the power and authority can be misused, and can take away civil liberties formally enjoyed by citizens of democracies.

However not all interpretations of the surveillance society are negative, some theorists have optimistic views on the surveillance society. David Brin, the author of "The Transparent Society", believes the rise of the surveillance society is imminent and unavoidable, however the repercussions need not be negative if the transparency is reciprocal.²³⁴ Brin predicts "a future where privacy and anonymity have been rendered obsolete by technological change"²³⁵ The opposite of a transparent or open society is a secretive society that protects not only citizens but the larger powers, such as world governments, businesses and the criminal underworld.

Marshall McLuhan believed that as man becomes more interconnected there will be a shift from the individualistic literate man back to the collective tribal man. "Privacy, like individualism, is unknown in tribal societies, a fact that Westerners need to keep in mind when estimating the attractions of our way of life to nonliterate people."²³⁶ Tribal man, according to McLuhan has no need for privacy, as the need for community and the global village would come before the need for individuality and fragmented

233 Britain is 'surveillance society'. – BBC News 2 November 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk/6108496.stm> (accessed 8 April 2015).

234 D. Brin, *The Transparent Society*.

235 Z. Stentz, *Unmasked Society*. – Metroactive 6 February 1997, <http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/02.06.97/cover/brin1-9706.html> (accessed 8 April 2015).

236 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 129.

self that characterised the literate man. Although tribal man may exist in the information age, where the need for privacy would be subversive to the values of the surveillance society – digital identities are collectively identified by their need for privacy and information self-determination, which would classify them as literate man, despite their tribal urges and need for community. The private and public paradox of the digital identity is something that complicates and contradicts basic user gratification theories and traditional understandings of how audience and media interact. If media is an extension of man, then digital identities are an extension of the human psyche and other realms of existence, not merely digital copies of our real life selves. The digital identity's paradox of requiring privacy and publicity at the same time is a microcosm of the larger trends in society and culture today. With the rise of surveillance or transparent society, the very definition of privacy is changing for citizens of the free world.

The digital identity, unlike the Internet user, can easily enjoy a state of assumed identity or anonymity – in many ways the Internet user has more freedom on the Internet than they do in real life. Perhaps that is what has made the Internet such a powerful creative platform, where people from all over the world can come together to create new communities and new identities; it is a brave new world. This is a grassroots movement with major cultural and social repercussions that have not yet been understood. Perhaps a motivational force for an individual to create a public yet private entity and exist on another level as a digital identity, is driven by the need to leave a mark behind.

The only thing we know about the future is that we die. The brief, messianic experience of the cybernetic supernatural is an attempt to control that future by creating a bubble of eternity in the fluid materiality of time.²³⁷

Informational self-determination is something that we have on the Internet and not in the real world. The idea of a fractured self

or post-modern definition of identity easily lends itself to the idea that who we are in real life does not have to be congruent with who we are online.²³⁸ We become more fluid and ephemeral online, able to express ourselves to closed or open audiences²³⁹ in ways we simply physically could not in the real world.

4.5. Conclusion: Future Research and Interdisciplinary Studies

Digital identities are the forms that humans assume to navigate the virtual world; they are the citizens of the global village, the content of social media. A very complex relationship has developed in the link between the online self and the offline self. The paradox of wanting privacy and publicity at the same time is only one of the contradicting yet defining characteristic of online existence. The use of pseudonyms, assumed and multiple identities can simultaneously distance the user from their online persona, yet at the same time provide the user a more authentic representation of themselves than they could express in the real world. As more and more people have access to the Internet, the population and popularity of digital identities will continue to grow exponentially. Web 2.0 platforms enable Internet users with limited technical skills and computer competence to create their own websites with the push of a button. The popular blogging website “Blogger”, refers to itself as “push button blogging”. The popularity and easy accessibility of these user-created content-based websites gives Internet users the opportunity to share ideas, photographs, stories and perhaps most importantly, themselves. To share information about yourself on the Internet is to create information about yourself and to struggle with the private and public paradox of creating and maintaining a digital identity. There are many questions and themes of digital culture and identity that can be explored and analysed utilising a variety

238 M. Boardman, *The Language of Websites*. New York: Routledge Press, 2005

239 S. Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics*

of frameworks, research methods and methodologies. What information is safe to share with others on the Internet? Should a digital identity be based on truth or fiction? Is there real world stigma against virtual reality based creations of identity? Is there stigma attached to fictional identities on the Internet? To what degree is the creation of a digital identity an act of self-expression or artistic expression? Or, are all digital identities conforming and adhering to an unspoken yet understood formula of tribal values?

The creation and utilisation of a digital self to function in the online community is a relatively new media phenomenon that requires the creation of new paradigms. Traditionally, media or audience studies and methodologies are often insufficient when studying the link between the user and their digital identity. The information revolution has spawned a new type of audience, no longer passive and consuming but instead active and producing.²⁴⁰ Creating a digital identity is potentially a creative and artistic act and can be a fulfilling form or self-expression for some Internet users. Artistic and creative research methods provide new ways to study and understand the relationships that an online user has with their digital identity or avatar. Traditional methods of media research and audience studies frequently use questionnaires or surveys. However when dealing with a topic as encoded and complex as identity and representing identity online the use of traditional research methods can be problematic. It is also possible that there is social stigma about the new online culture and post-modern ideas of identity that do not translate to popular and modernist philosophies of a singular, unfragmented self such as the idea of "one true self".

It is possible that the evasiveness or undercurrents of hostility when discussing the topic of digital identity when conducting a study in a traditional method such as interviews and questionnaires is firmly rooted in the private and public paradox of digital identities. As the Internet and Web 2.0 platforms create an environment where people can express themselves is a much more liberated and less consequential space than in the real world, discussing

240 D. Gauntlett, *Creative Explorations*.

what they do on the Internet and what kind of identities they have created may feel like an invasion of privacy itself.

The idea of social media such as weblogs (blogs), Facebook updates or Twitter tweets representing a modern form of narrative is very exciting. It would be interesting to find out if the content of social media can be interpreted as part of contemporary narratives, if then digital identity can be viewed as a type of modern folklore and storyteller. Though it is also possible to view digital identity as the story themselves, as they are the creative expression of an offline user to function in the online world, almost like a translation or metamorphosis of the self. Although the virtual environment has provided new modes of existence in the form of new ways to present ourselves and communicate with others, there are still very traditional aspects to new technology, they still exist to fill cultural and basic social needs. A seemingly basic and global human need is that of storytelling and storytellers, which has evolved to a more diffused cultural background and larger anonymous audience in the information age.

Are there pan-cultural forms defining a generic human form of life? This does not seem a far-fetched hypothesis, but the issue needs to be settled by wider comparative studies. What is true is that every culture of which we know has been a storytelling culture.²⁴¹

The direct translation of narrative studies and sociolinguistics to the online interactive environment is a challenging task as it requires new paradigms of stories and storytellers, self and community and other terms which have had to take on new meanings in a virtual environment. Another complication about studying digital identity as an online narrative and utilising literate and oral model resources²⁴² is that the online environment can at times be a purely visual environment, which is sometimes not only the context but the “text” itself. To only pay attention to text in an

241 J. Brockmeier, R. Harre, *Narrative: Problems and promises...*, p. 266.

242 R. Page, *New Perspectives on Narrative...*

online environment is to lose sight of the larger picture, in the sense that studying the online environment by only analysing texts and narrative structure would be ignoring a largely visual environment. However utilising a variety of methods to study digital identity and the digital environment as both visual and a narrative can perhaps reveal a lot more about the phenomenon than simply concentrating on one or the other. In this sense, virtual ethnography and visual ethnography are both very interesting methodologies to use when studying digital identity.

To probe the subject of digital identity, includes visual ethnographic analyses of the images and creative research methods²⁴³ to explore the motives of the offline Internet user for creating content and a sense of “self” online. The narrative structure of online communication would be interesting to delve into, as there is a separate unique vernacular that has developed on the web. Much like William Labov studied the African American English vernacular and in doing so developed the methodology for sociolinguistics, so studying the vernacular used in online communities could help develop a framework and methodology for studying digital ethnography and digital culture.²⁴⁴

The work of Erving Goffman has been essential in the study of digital identity, particularly “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”.²⁴⁵ Goffman’s idea that social interaction and face to face interaction are framed as theatrical performances, with the metaphor of the self as a performer and life being a stage with the back stage symbolising privacy and private lives and the front stage symbolising the public and public actions, easily translates to the notion of the digital identity being a mode of performance or theatrics that utilises the online environment as a stage on which to perform. Georgakopoulou further expands Goffman’s exploration of the storyteller as performer and propagandists, able to “diffuse their agency or responsibility”²⁴⁶ to keep themselves in line with popular opinion, support and positive feedback. Much in the

243 D. Gauntlett, *Creative Explorations*.

244 W. Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, pp. 354–96

245 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

246 A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories*, p. 16.

same way a digital identity can also “manipulate a kaleidoscope of selves”²⁴⁷ to multi-function and fit into different environments and roles that have been outlined online.

As the study of digital identity and digital ethnography are still in their relative infancy compared to more established fields of cultural studies such as narratology, film and media studies, social anthropology, visual ethnography, etc., it is up to the researchers and theorists in the field of digital ethnography today to develop new frameworks to base theories on and create new methodologies to probe a new form of culture and identity.

The fact that the Internet is such a diverse, chaotic, rapidly changing organism makes it very hard to pin down and analyse or generalise about a particular topic or phenomenon. Cultures are always changing and evolving, but on the Internet the concept of time and space is much more asynchronous and fragmented than in other traditional forms of media and communication.²⁴⁸ It is an exciting idea that the Internet is not simply a new form of technology, a communication tool that we utilise much like any other form of media, but rather it is the “digitisation of us” and that we become on some level the content of the Internet, what is commonly referred to as Web 2.0 (user created Internet content). “...the key cultural consideration of the Internet is not so much the digitization of information, but the digitization of us.”²⁴⁹ The interesting question concerning digital identity can then be asked, to what extent is Web 2.0 user created Internet content and not content created Internet user?

247 A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories*, p. 16.

248 R. Page, *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality*.

249 M. Federman, *The Cultural Paradox of the Global Village*.

5. Surfing the Digital Wave: Digital Identity as Extension²⁵⁰

5.1 Numbing, Auto-Amputation and Extension

Electronic technology that developed out of the 20th century and culminated into the cultural prevalence of mass media, first in the form of cinema and television and later digital media, has provided cultural researchers and philosophers with complex new frontiers to explore. Marshall McLuhan in “The Gutenberg Galaxy”²⁵¹ and Martin Heidegger in “The Question Concerning Technology”²⁵² discussed the idea of media and technology as an extension of man, and sought to understand technology in its cultural as well as philosophical context.

Technology as a tool and extension of man creates new capacity and influence, both intended and unintended. A core philosophical problem of technology as extension, is that much like language it transforms the world, so do the extensions of man, which result in a change of meaning. Technology is used to make sense of the world through symbolic meaning and spontaneous action.²⁵³ In the digital context this change of meaning is profound and reaches far into the facets of everyday life. The identities of the citizens of the global village are user-created digital identities and the villages are online communities. This shift from original, tangible meaning to virtual, technologically mediated constructions has changed the way we see ourselves and the world around us.

McLuhan stated, “With the arrival of electric technology, man

250 Koosel, S, McLuhan’s Philosophy of Media – Centennial Conference. Yoni Van Den Eede, Joke Bauwens, Joke Beyl, Marc Van den Bossche & Karl Verstryngne (eds.). Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie Van Belgie Voor Wetenschappen En Kunsten, 2012, pp. 163–169.

251 M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

252 M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*.

253 H. Ruin, *Technology as Destiny* in Cassirer and Heidegger.

extended, or set outside himself, a live model of the central nervous system itself. To the degree that this is so, it is a development that suggests a desperate and suicidal autoamputation, as if the central nervous system could no longer depend on the physical organs to be protective buffers against the slings and arrows of outrageous mechanism."²⁵⁴ This has come to be: the digital age has brought about an electronic interdependence, and a change of cognitive and social organisation, including a transformation of media structure, modes of communication and identity narratives.

In his 1964 work, "Understanding Media" McLuhan explored the idea in the chapter: "The Gadget Love: Narcissus as Narcosis." He posits that that every new medium will produce both a challenging and numbing effect, as the new medium will effect our balance between patterned simultaneous transmissions. It is important here to remember that we rely on pattern recognition in order to maintain equilibrium when we are faced with sensory and information overload.

In the classical Greek myth of Narcissus (the word "Narcissus" itself taken from the Greek word narcosis or numbness), the youth Narcissus did not recognize his own reflection in water, as the extension of his own image numbed his sense of perception making him into a closed system, servomechanism²⁵⁵ to his own extended image. McLuhan clarifies that Narcissus did not fall in love with himself, as is a popular interpretation of the myth – but rather that Narcissus fell in love and adapted to the extension of himself, and in doing so closed himself off to the rest of the world around him. The fact that the Narcissus myth has been interpreted as a story of someone falling in love with their own image (and recognising it as themselves) is an indication of our "intensely technological and, therefore, narcotic culture..."²⁵⁶ The point of the Narcissus myth, according to McLuhan is the fact that man is captivated and entranced by extensions of themselves in other materials and mediums.

254 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 47.

255 The term servomechanism originates in engineering as a type of feedback control system. McLuhan used the term to describe an individual's adverse relationship to a technology, when their existence exists solely for technology to function.

256 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 46.

“Narcissus as Narcosis” can be applied to contemporary digital culture, where social media platforms and user created content have cultivated an environment where the reproduction of self is primary entertainment. What may start out as joining a social network out of curiosity or peer pressure can end in finding oneself merely servomechanism to our own extended image online at the expense of our participation or gratification in the offline or real world. We may find ourselves so numbed and entranced with our autoamputated, extension of self on the screen that we can become oblivious to the narcotic like effects of what is sold to us as tools of communication.

The extension of self in another medium can be the result of the stress of information overload and an increasingly demanding pace. The onslaught of information and communication stimuli is what McLuhan called “the stress of acceleration of pace and increase of load.”²⁵⁷ Information overload and super stimulation of various kinds, will force the body to seek balance and maintain equilibrium – therefore other senses will be cut-off or autoamputated by creating an extension. The extension of any sense will alter our thoughts and actions, as well as the way we perceive our environment and ourselves.

The impact of our extensions such as new technological gadgets and transforming media structures effect our cognitive and social organisation, including modes of communication and self-identity. As our technology changes so do our ideas about the world around us, and who we are in relation to it. The fundamental problem with extensions of man, their numbing effects and self-amputation solutions are that these conditions are subliminal and forbid self-recognition, as the effects of media happen below the levels of perception and opinions.²⁵⁸

This triple act of numbing, self-amputating and extensions are done as self-preservation, as a coping mechanism for humans with a limited capacity to perceive and focus attention at a time when the world is becoming increasingly and overwhelmingly

257 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 46.

258 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

filled with media stimuli. We can find ourselves bombarded with visual information in the form of advertising, spam, scams and unsolicited information that is personalized and made to seem important competing for our attention. "The perception of reality now depends upon the structure of information."²⁵⁹ With the onset of the electric/information age and its concomitant decentralization, integration and acceleration of the pace of information and media activity, communication has shifted away from being specialist and linear to simultaneous and ambiguous in meaning. Information can reach us now in many different forms, from a text to a phone call, from a fax to a tweet, from a letter to social network wall post – the meta-information is the information, the context is the text, and the medium is the message.

The amplification of the senses is only tolerable through numbing or blocking out of others. This sensory overload and shut-down is demonstrated, for example, by the reactions of passengers aboard airplanes who cannot taste their food because of the background noise of the airplane engines.²⁶⁰ The sense of taste is not the only perception that is altered by the background noise, but also the perceived texture or "crunchiness". A recent study found that the louder the background noise, the less people could taste "salty or sweet" and the more "crunchy" food was perceived as being.²⁶¹ If mere background sound or white noise has such effects on sensory perception, the deeply disturbing overall effect of the noisy, attention-jarring new media world is not difficult to see.

Almost half a century prior to the 2010 study, McLuhan made reference to a dental drill known as "the audiac" where dental patients could use headphones to raise noise levels to a point of no longer being able to feel pain from the dentist's drill. "Yet if sound, for example, is intensified, touch and taste and sight are affected at once."²⁶² This observation begs the question, why

259 E. McLuhan, F. Zingrone, *Essential McLuhan*. New York: Basic Books, 1995, p. 3.

260 J. Palmer, Background noise affects taste of foods, research shows. BBC News, 14 October 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-11525897> (accessed 8 April 2015).

261 J. Palmer, Background noise affects...

262 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 49.

are we still in the dark ages of understanding the effects of the technological, visual and auditory world around us? Almost fifty years after McLuhan explored the effects of our technology on the psyche, research has yet to move forward significantly, we are still poised to re-discover the same idea. This scenario would suggest a trend where technology may be infiltrating our lives and sense at a much greater pace than our ability to understand the effects and pressure they place on our sensorium and psyche.

5.2 Electronic Exhibitionism: Selling the Sender

Paul Levinson explored the idea of the Internet user as online content, interpreting McLuhan's ideas about extending the disembodied sender to recipients of electric information. McLuhan expanded the user and content arguments of literary critics (such as I.A Richards in 1929) that the meaning of a text was to be determined by the reader of the text,²⁶³ and not in the author's intentions: "McLuhan took Richards to heart, and moved very reasonably from the user interpreting the text to determining the text to being the text."²⁶⁴

Identity narratives shared in the online environment can be seen as a hybrid of autobiographical information with the subconscious identity as performance. Derrick de Kerckhove predicted in the mid-nineties, that changing or tweaking our personal identity would become a primary form of entertainment in the future.²⁶⁵ The idea of "cosmetic surgery of the psyche"²⁶⁶ or "the user being the text" has shifted from abstract metaphors to apt descriptions of the current culture of identity renegotiation on the new media platforms of the social web. As the social web is a virtual reality, where we do not exist in the corporal sense but only what we can demonstrate in the form of photos, text, video or

263 I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*. London: Routledge Classics, 2001.

264 P. Levinson, *Digital McLuhan: a guide to the information millennium*. London: Routledge, 2001, p. 39.

265 D. de Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture*, p. 20.

266 D. de Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture*, p. 20.

sound. Thus information about the identity of the Internet user is shared to create a new entity online, not necessarily linear or congruent in any way with the offline Internet user. These mediated forms of identity creation and communication were once the domain of artists and authors: with the accessibility, however, of what is known as Web 2.0 – user-generated content has become a prime form of entertainment and communication for Internet users such as bloggers and social networkers.

The online environment has provided new opportunities to express identity and community through multi-media tools such as photography, video, sound and the written word. Users created Internet content on social media platforms have changed the traditional relationship between media producers and media consumers. In the case of digital identity narratives, it is the media consumer who has become the content of social media platforms. The technological and cultural phenomenon of digital identities is a result of contextual information shift, from the multi-sensory physical world to a multimodal virtual environment. Digital identity defined simply as an assumed online identity can be seen as the manipulation of a kaleidoscope of selves²⁶⁷ tailored to fit into different environments and roles online. Identity narrative and extension theory provide a theoretical and empirical foundation to understand the contemporary social media as something more significant than mere technological trends – identity narrative and extension theory can be the key to explore cultural and social significance in contemporary culture.

One of the ways we can understand the world around us is by observing new perceptual habits brought about by the media that we use. As technology creates new environments, society is deeply influenced by the changing phases of communication – to an extent where art and communications shape society in their image.²⁶⁸ Social media has created an environment where collectivism is valued over individualism, publicity is more valued than privacy and corporate interdependence is valued over corporate

267 A. Georgakopoulou, *Small Stories, Interactions and Identities*.

268 H. H. Crosby, G. R. Bond, *The McLuhan Explosion*.

independence. Movable type created “the public”, rendering individualism obsolete and corporate interdependence mandatory.²⁶⁹ Data mining on the Internet often exchanges personal information (and thus the freedom of an individual to privacy) for the “free” use of a service. The extension of a social self and interpersonal interactions are accentuated and accelerated by the industry of gathering and selling personal information on the Internet.

This selling of the “real life self” online can be seen as the commodification of the individual, selling what was once private human existence in both a voyeuristic and commercial sense. The key difference between a human being and an objects when being sold as commodities is that a human is able to try to avoid being discarded by keeping “the magic alive” – something an object cannot do.²⁷⁰ When we become servomechanism²⁷¹ to our extensions online, the gratifications of attention, interaction and a feeling of community can make leaving the social web as difficult as leaving a cult, there is a lock in effect when we have adapted to our online extensions of self and community.

5.3 Identity Loss and Retrieval

The Global Village of corporate consumer values stimulates local people to retrieve who they used to be as a protection for their fading identities, for electric process makes us all nobodies desperate for identity.²⁷²

The crucial connection between having a sense of self and an identity through sharing narratives (past, present or future) has been explored in narrative theory, psychology and sociology. Memory and narrative are the twin support structures of identity: without the ability to remember and tell a story, identity ceases to exist –

269 M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

270 K. Hillis, *Digital Sensations*, p. 152.

271 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

272 E. McLuhan, F. Zingrone, *Essential McLuhan*, p. 4.

for what is a person without their story?²⁷³ An example of the loss of ability to remember and share narratives associated with memory loss and storytelling is demonstrated by the cognitive impairments of dementia, where an individual must find coping mechanisms or behavioural adaptations just to be able to function normally in everyday life. For some dementia sufferers writing themselves into existence in journals is a therapeutic tool in order to retrieve their lost memories and sense of identity.²⁷⁴

A parallel development on social networking websites is the virtual reconstruction of identity to make up for the disembodied sender. This reconstruction or replication of the self can be seen as an act of identity performance and identity narrative. The theatrical metaphor of identity as “performance” and social situations or contexts as “stages” have been explored in depth by Erving Goffman in “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”.²⁷⁵ Goffman notes that identity performance is dependent on the social situation, context and audience involved. This concept of identity as something that is not fixed and rigid but instead flexible, liquid or a kaleidoscope of selves is shared by, among others, Michel Foucault,²⁷⁶ Anthony Giddens,²⁷⁷ Paul Ricoeur²⁷⁸ and David Gauntlett.²⁷⁹

McLuhan has traced the ways forms and experience affect mental outlook and expression. With the technological advancements of a typographical, mechanical and electric age a diverse world began to resolve and dissolve from contrasted forms of experience. Any technology tends to create a new human environment. Human environments, social environments and technological environments are not merely passive but active processes that reshape people as well as other technologies. Neil Postman’s

273 P. J. Eakin, *Living Autobiographically*.

274 J. Brockmeier, L.-C. Hyden, *Health, Illness and Culture, Broken Narratives*. New York: Routledge, 2008.

275 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

276 M. Foucault, *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998.

277 A. Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity*.

278 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

279 D. Gauntlett, *Creative Explorations*.

fourth law of “Five Things We Need To Know about Technological Change” states that technological change is ecological not additive, it does not add something new; rather it changes everything.²⁸⁰ During and after technological change there is a change in worldview, a paradigm shift, much like any other scientific revolution.²⁸¹ When Gutenberg invented the printing press in 15th century Europe, the impact was not divided, that there was Europe and then there was the printing press – instead a different Europe came into existence.²⁸²

Much like today, the emergence of user created Internet content in the form of identity recreation; retrieval and extension has created different individuals and communities. “The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act – the way we perceive the world.”²⁸³ McLuhan predicted our electronic corporate interdependence and technological extensions of self (identity, memory and narrative). Online communities are extensions of what used to be real communities, online communication replaces what used to be interpersonal, face-to-face or at least oral-aural interaction. The social media phenomena of an extended sense of self to some Internet users may be more relevant and rewarding to exist as – than a physical corporal self. These extensions deserve to be explored philosophically to better understand the mind-altering effects of our irrepressible yet misunderstood relationship with technology.

280 N. Postman, *Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change*.

281 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

282 N. Postman, *Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change*.

283 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 41.

6. Ethnographies of Social Networks: Virtual Ethnography and Digital Identity²⁸⁴

6.1. Introduction

The use of the Internet in cultural research has opened up many new dimensions for ethnographic fieldwork.²⁸⁵ The Internet can be used both as a research tool for gathering data and as a cultural artefact or object of research itself.²⁸⁶ The first ethnographic studies of the Internet in the 1990s demonstrated how new cultural practices and social interactions exist in computer-mediated communication. Digital communication technology has become so pervasive in social relationships that we can easily take them for granted and forget just how much they have altered our personal and collective sense of perception and experience. Unlike previous forms of mass media, the Internet enabled new forms of human communication that reshaped the traditional relationship between the media producers and the media consumers. With this technological shift, the media consumer transformed from being merely a passive audience member to becoming an active media content producer.²⁸⁷ User created Internet content, often referred to as Web 2.0, is shared at present on Internet platforms like social networks such as Facebook, web-logs (blogs) such as BlogSpot and forums or comment sections on news or entertainment websites.

The Internet has multiple temporal and spatial orderings, which have more to do with social practices and context creation

284 S. Koosel, *InterArtive: A Platform for Contemporary Art and Thought*, Issue #52, 2013, <http://interartive.org/2013/05/ethnographies-social-networks-artist-digital-identity>.

285 A. Wittel, *Ethnography on the Move: From Field to Net to Internet*. – *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 2000, Vol. 1, No. 1, Art. 21, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0001213> (accessed 8 April 2015).

286 E. Ardèvol, *Virtual/Visual Ethnography*.

287 D. Gauntlett, *Creative Explorations*.

by the users than the intrinsic effects of the technology itself.²⁸⁸ In the digital environment, computer users must navigate the boundaries between self and community, the private and the public and the relationship between the offline and online world. Digital identity is the individual unit of a larger subculture or on-line micro culture that is often referred to as digital culture. The relatively new social phenomenon of digital identity stems from a need to communicate identity in a virtual environment as a disembodied sender. Online, we have no identity information in the form of bodies in the corporeal sense – which obscures identity information.²⁸⁹ To be able to exist in mediated contexts, Internet users have to rely on text, visual, audio or video information to communicate identity.

Media studies and ethnography have both been used to analyze and interpret meaning in the production and reception of media texts. When aiming to provide a critical exploration of our relationship with technology and its impact on our lives, we must reject the assumption that there are inherent characteristics of technology that affect us.²⁹⁰ Instead, we can concentrate on different ways of thinking about our relationship with technology, our assumptions, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. For these reasons, ethnography can be seen as an ideal methodological tool for exploring the ways identity communication and interpretation are experienced by participants in an online environment.

288 C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*.

289 S. Cubitt, *Digital Aesthetics*.

290 K. Grint, D. Woolgar, *The Machine at Work: Technology, Work and Organization*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997.

6.2 Experiencing Virtual Reality

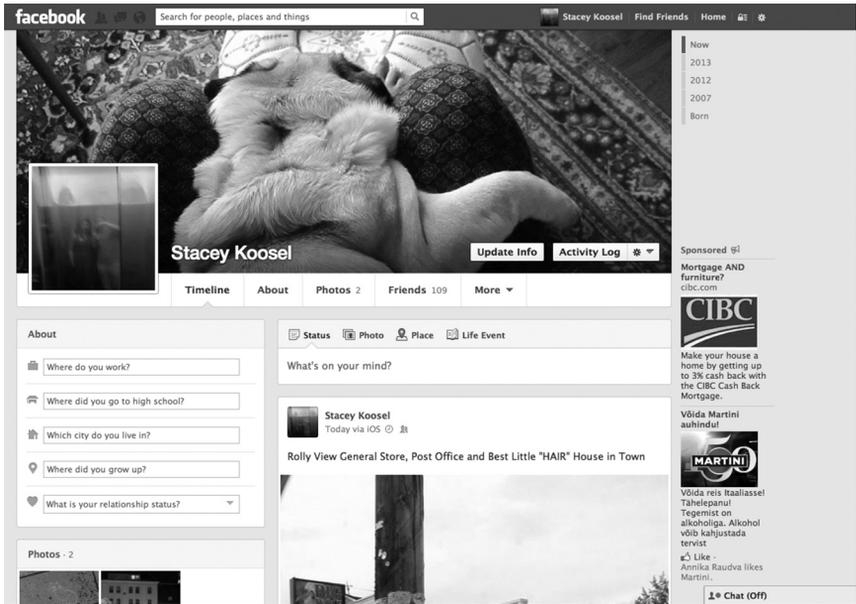


Figure 2. Facebook Profile (2012)

As the popularity of social media exponentially increases, researchers from many different academic disciplines including media studies, sociology, psychology and anthropology continue to attempt to define the relationship between technology and society, culture and the individual. Ethnographic interview-based research offers answers to questions concerning why people engage in community and identity construction on social media platforms. What fuels the need or the cultural pressures of representing oneself in a virtual space online? Social media is such a new phenomena, that it is difficult to pin down and describe. Answering the simplest questions about social media “why does it exist?”, “why do people use it?” and perhaps most interesting for the ethnographer, “how do people experience it?” seem to baffle even those who have used or studied the medium for a long time.

Placing communication technology into a historical context

can help place the current puzzling phenomena into perspective or at the very least, organize the technology in a timeline of events. From the written word to the Guttenberg press,²⁹¹ the telegraph,²⁹² radio, and television to the Internet and the World Wide Web, technology has always brought about great cultural changes that have been referred to as: industrial, technological, scientific, information and digital revolutions.²⁹³ As McLuhan explains, during periods of great technological change, grasping and perceiving what is going on in our own time proves to be challenging:

The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception.²⁹⁴

An analogy used to describe social media in previous media forms would be considering the impact if everyone had been given their own television channel or newspaper – and they were given unlimited opportunity to present whatever ideas they could think of. However, the way the social network system is engineered is to create a replica of their personal life, starting with their name and personal statistics (where they work, study, places they go, things they like) to creating an audience of everyone they know¹ and then keeping their audience entertained and interested through frequent updates. The platform is merely mediating, the content is the user – without the users willingness to share, perform or connect using the platform, there would be no content.

Social network websites, the most popular in the English speaking world being Facebook, have essentially given any individual with a computer and Internet connection the opportunity

291 E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press...*

292 T. Standage, *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-Line Pioneers*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014.

293 M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*.

294 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p. 7.

to create a “digital identity” online. The experience is subjective, in the fact that every user will interpret their environment, interpret other user’s actions, and decide what is safe to post and what is not safe to share, how they choose to present themselves, and interpret meaning from the information shared by others.

How do people react to a new environment like this? We have no precedence for such social environments since the software is designed to coerce more user interaction. Facebook constantly suggests friends you may not have “friended” yet and prompts users to interact with someone you haven’t interacted with lately, it constantly streams updates of what your friends post, it literally asks ask you how you are doing and if you could share that information with everyone else. In this kind of environment, the social network user is put in a precarious position, where the urge to share can be overshadowed by the fear of what others reactions will be and the task of performing or enacting different personas for different groups of people, much like “real life” social contexts.

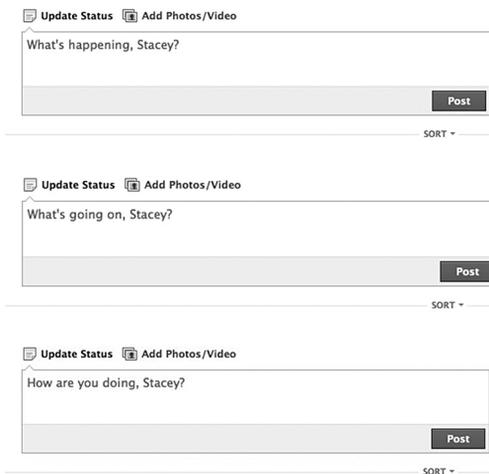


Figure 3. Facebook Update Status (2012)

The subject of communicating a “true” self and tensions between the inner self and public or social portrayal of self have always been a subject of investigation and discussion long before digital

technology, social media networks and digital identity. Dramaturgical analogies²⁹⁵ have been used to describe self-presentation and impression management from Plato's "great stage of human life"²⁹⁶ to Shakespeare likening human existence to theatrics when he wrote that the world was a stage.²⁹⁷

Sociologist Erving Goffman continues to elaborate on symbolic interactionism with dramaturgical themes in his 1959 work "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" which further discussed the ideas of identity as performance and the different stages (contexts) where identity is performed for specific audiences.²⁹⁸ The private sphere being the backstage, and the public sphere being the front stage and every audience member or situation dictating a symbolic interaction. Intersubjectivity and identity as co-construction through interaction with others was further explored in the field of phenomenology and hermeneutics by scholars such as Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur theorized that the self is revealed through interaction with others, making contact with others an intersubjective relationship which is further embedded in social customs, groups, communities and cultural traditions.²⁹⁹

It is in this sense that I speak of the hermeneutical arch through which the work of art is a mediation between man and the world, between man and another man, and between man and himself. So it is a mediating stage in a process of communication, man and man; referentiality, or man and the world; but also self-understanding, man and himself.³⁰⁰

Individuality exists within a social sphere and what individuals may conceptualize as their own special personality is actually

295 E. Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning: A Perspective in Psychiatry and Anthropology*. New York: The Free Press, 1962.

296 *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*. Eds. A. S. R. Manstead. M. Hewstone. Malden, Oxford, Victoria: Malden, 1996.

297 W. Shakespeare, *As You Like It*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.

298 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

299 P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*.

300 C. E. Reagan, *Paul Ricoeur: His Life and Work*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 108.

a continual co-construction with every interaction and appropriation of other subjective markers such as social, collective, and cultural identities. Ricoeur's post-modern model of identity is tied to the relationship between the self and the other. In the same way, social networks provide individuals with platforms on which they can construct and communicate identities by cultural markers of identity including who they associate or communicate with, as well as community or collective connections. The idea of identity by association has been a recurring theme in my own research, which has used an ethnographic approach to researching how artists, writers, academics and other creative professionals understand self-presentation on Facebook.

This research was conducted in a casual setting, with face-to-face (offline) conversations based on a list of questions, of how artists construct and interpret identity on Facebook. The findings were surprising in that the tone ranged from neurosis and paranoia to critical and cynical reactions from my informants. It seemed that being questioned about Facebook is an uncomfortable conversation for many people as there seems to be a social stigma and judgmental reaction that extends to how they present themselves and interpret the actions of others on Facebook. When asked how they present themselves or how they communicate who they are and if they worry about the way other people perceive them, people responded with rather restricted, curt responses or avoided answering the question by talking about something else. When asked how others present themselves the respondents reacted much more openly and responsively with enthusiasm and information, albeit cynical and sarcastic at times.

The following responses are to a question posed in every interview asking: How do people communicate who they are on Facebook? How do they tell others about themselves?

Oh, you don't have to ask anyone, you just check their portfolio and some people write (in sarcastic voice) "Oh I'm working in this such organization: Oh, I'm working here and blah, blah." Or, some people they don't write that, so then you start to...But, still you can more or less figure out who this person

is from their friends. Then you know what kind of friends he usually has and you can figure out the rest. I think that Facebook is training you to become a detective! You can trace something before you ask!

(Female, 30, Artist)

The first thing I'm checking is if we have common friends, this gives me an idea because Estonia is small. Maybe it's like this everywhere. Who he knows, this gives me quite a good idea of what kind of person he is. It's funny you can even know about his sexuality, because if you have a person from let's say the arts scene and they have friends not just in the art scene but the gay scene, then I start asking myself why does he know him, him, and him. So probably, ok. (laugh) So that's one thing I look at, common friends.

(Male, 30, Artist)

They put pictures, good pictures of themselves – you know they're drinking wine, they're in nice places like the beach and it shows that they are very successful, if they want to create a successful image. Or, they post links to sites that they like and they'll say "it's so cool" because it's a site that they like and this is the way to do it. If they put pictures with their friends or certain people in these pictures then they show what kind of social life they have, you know this kind of stuff. They don't want to show, "oh my god I had an ugly outfit" or I was un-cool, nobody wants you to show that – you can get in trouble if you put pictures up, they always un-tag themselves because they want to show they are pretty and successful. If people have children, they have to put all the photos of their children up because then you can see how successful he or she is in this area. Nobody puts photos of themselves drunk, wasted, throwing up – we have these kind of pictures but we don't put them on Facebook, of course not.

(Female, 30, Artist)

Good pictures, good texts – and a good mixture of both. And there are some people of course who go onto Facebook and you wonder why they do because you don't even get a picture. I mean what's the bloody point? I think the pictures and the texts are just a snapshot...that's what they look like now, that's what they're doing now. But I can't see how you can infer anything of depth from jolly snaps of people's holidays.

(Female, 64, Artist)

Just from fragments of these interviews about self-presentation and how others present themselves on Facebook – we can begin to see the complexity of identity performances on social networks. Users are uncomfortable when their friends (a Facebook term for contacts) overshare and divulge too much personal information and they are also angry when their friends do not share enough information. People are accused of posturing or posing to try to make themselves look better, more successful, more important or connected socially than they really are. Although the website itself urges users to share as much information as possible, users still feel that they can read between the lines, or as one respondent referred to it, “play detective” to find out more about who the person behind the profile really is, often by association, who they are friends with, what they like, what affiliations they have and so forth. It has been noted in various studies conducted on social media and youth that expressing an enthusiasm or liking Facebook is not a “cool” thing to do. Rather, cynicism can pass for sophistication and complaining or making fun of social networks is one way of dealing with the confusion, jealousy, anger, irritation, and blows to self-esteem that the website seems to inflict on its own users. However, it is interesting to note that no matter how much anyone complained and found fault with the social networking website – no one had any plans of deleting their account and leaving.

6.3. Perception, Discourse Analysis and Virtual Ethnography

The image shows a Facebook profile page for Stacey Koosel. The profile name is 'Stacey Koosel' with an 'About' dropdown menu. The page is divided into several sections:

- Work and Education:** Lists 'Graduate School' at 'EESTI KUNSTI, Estonian Academy of Arts'. There is an 'Add a Job' button.
- History by Year:** Shows '1982' and 'Born on June 12, 1982'.
- About You:** Includes a 'Write About Yourself' button.
- Living:** Features 'Add Your Current City' and 'Add Your Hometown' buttons.
- Relationships and Family:** Includes an 'Add Your Relationships' button.
- Basic Info:** Lists 'Add Languages', 'Add Religious Views', and 'Add Political Views' buttons.
- Contact Info:** Shows 'Facebook' with the URL 'http://facebook.com/stacey.koosel'. It also includes 'Add Mobile Phone', 'Add Screen Name', and 'Add Address' buttons.
- Favorite Quotations:** Includes an 'Add a Favorite Quotation' button.

Figure 4. Facebook Information Blanks (2012)

Identity play in virtual environments existed before the emergence of the Internet and the World Wide Web, in the text based world of the ARPANET. Role playing games in Multi-user dungeons (MUDs)³⁰¹ gained popularity in the mid-1970s and were used right up until the 1990s; they were the predecessors of virtual worlds and (IRC) instant messaging. Early ethnographic research of emerging computer cultures based on many years of participant observation and both group face-to-face interviews

301 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

and online correspondence by Sherry Turkle pioneered the field of investigation into the construction and presentation of self-identity in a virtual environment. By the mid to late 1990s, discourse on methodological,³⁰² ethical,³⁰³ and philosophical issues³⁰⁴ of conducting ethnographies³⁰⁵ of the Internet were gaining momentum and attention by the academic community.³⁰⁶

The challenge of perceiving and interpreting social media environments involve many different discourses, research approaches, and perspectives. The phenomena can be analyzed utilizing many different methodologies including interdisciplinary approaches as the virtual environment and rapid changes in technology require a certain amount of reflexivity and adaptability. Quantitative studies are predominant in the field, as they are generally favoured by sociological and media researchers, which makes generalizations based on surveys of large samplings of the population. There are many studies done on social media and digital identity with quantitative techniques such as surveys either conducted online or offline, as well as qualitative interviews or observation conducted entirely in the online context of the digital environment. The relationship between the cultural researcher, such as an ethnographer and the online/virtual environment can be summarized into three possible placements of researcher and field, although a mixture of approaches is not uncommon:

- Online based observation: the ethnographer as part of the online environment or community, observing and describing how others present themselves or interact in that particular community. Possible interaction with or observing others only in the online environment and not offline in the real world.

302 D. Jacobson, *Doing Research in Cyberspace*. – *Field Methods* 1999, 11, no. 2, pp 127–45.

303 S. Jones, *Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net*. London: Sage Publications, 1999.

304 D. Hakken, *Cyborgs@Cyberspace?: An Ethnographer Looks to the Future*. New York: Routledge Press, 1999.

305 B. L. Mason, *Moving Toward Virtual Ethnography*. – *American Folklore Society News* 1996, Vol. 25, No. 2.

306 E. Reid, *Virtual Worlds: culture and imagination*. London: Sage Publications, 1995.

- Autoethnography: self-experience used to understand and describe identity play in online environment. Either a more active user or a participant observer or participant lurker.
- Offline interaction with informants: the ethnographer speaks to informants in a face-to-face, offline setting. Asking the informants how they understand the online environment, how they present themselves, and how they interpret how others present themselves.

Using traditional ethnographic devices such as first person, experientially based knowledge to study digital culture helps retain authenticity of mediated perceptions and experiences.³⁰⁷ Whether these interactions between researcher and informant take place online or offline depends on how much the researcher plans on interpreting the information. The more qualitative the study, the more a researcher can interpret through face-to-face interviews about online experiences. Visual interpretation can gauge not only what the informant is sharing about their experience, but also how they say it, body language and facial expressions give another layer of meaning to the information being transmitted in face-to-face interviews.

The differentiation between self, other and environment is perhaps one motivating factor for identity creation on social media platforms such as social networks. However the demand for online identity sharing platforms in popular culture and the academic fascination with the topic itself, has led theorists to believe that “identity” becomes an issue when it is threatened or questioned and the need to clearly proclaim and present proof of self signifies loss of identity and attempted retrieval.³⁰⁸ Current factors such as globalization, increasing social mobility, and insecurity in personal relationships contribute to feelings of uncertainty and fragmentation.³⁰⁹ With dissolving traditional roles such as those related to sex, race, and social position – is it possible that these changes have led to identity loss and attempted retrieval in

307 C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*.

308 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

309 Z. Bauman, *Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004.

a reconstructed sense of self, shared online?

Corporeality in the virtual environment of social networking platforms are characterized by an acute sensitivity or self-consciousness about audience, self-presentation and self-promotion.³¹⁰ They are a platform where the users are urged to share as much information as often as possible. However, as all the information shared has the potential of becoming available to the general public and not just a select audience – the social media user has to constantly negotiate their social and professional reputation with every status update or comment they post. Popular discourse on digital media and digital culture are often presented by simplistic dualisms: whether the Internet and social networks are good or bad for society, individuals or children. Other dualisms debated about digital culture include: what is virtual versus what is real, the unverified and misleading versus the validity or trustworthiness of information found on the Internet, and perhaps the most discussed dualist aspect of digital culture is the debate on privacy versus publicity.

Using an ethnographic approach however compensates for the dualisms in political, economical and cultural discourse when it comes to Internet interactions, by providing a kind of cultural relativism. “The intention is to sidestep questions of what identities really are and whether reality is really there, by shifting to an empirical focus on how, where and when identities and realities are made available on the Internet.”³¹¹ Instead of engaging in the current discourse on identity politics or dualisms on Internet interactions (good or bad, public or private, authentic or fake) the ethnographer can communicate the roles, needs and values of the culture on its own terms.

310 d. boyd, *Social Network Sites as Networked Publics*, pp. 39–58.

311 C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*, p. 118.

6.4. The Reflexive Self in Virtual Environments

A popular topic that is often brought up when discussing self-presentation in virtual environments, like social networks sites, is the idea of the reflexive self. According to Anthony Giddens, self-identity is a reflexive project – a project that is continuously analyzed, formulated and changed.³¹² Self-identity is seen as not a set of characteristics or traits, rather an individual's own reflexive beliefs about their own biography. Many Facebook users (from the 2012 Artists, Academics and Facebook study)³¹³ speak of how they used to present themselves when they were new to the technology, how they shared photos and shared more about themselves and how this sharing made them feel more enthralled with the site because when they posted videos or photos they received feedback from their friends. However, the users began to feel like their social network or audience (friend list) grew too big as they accepted more people than they actually felt comfortable sharing with. In the end they did not share any more photos and in some cases deleted or modified the information they had there to fit with the new more anonymous public whom they did not feel as comfortable with.

In general, the amount of freedom a social network user has to express themselves is hotly contested, as some argue that the construction of identities online is making the self into a commodity to sell, and unlike an object that is being sold, individuals can adapt and “keep the magic alive.”³¹⁴ Many artists I spoke to see Facebook as a professional place for networking and developing their career – and not as a place to share personal things they like with their friends and family. Other researchers have voiced concern over the fact that users are encouraged to construct identities

312 A. Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity*.

313 Interviews conducted with artists associated with academies in Tallinn, Estonia most of whom are associated with the Estonian Academy of Arts or the Estonian Academy of Music and Theater between May and August of 2012. The subjects were asked the same set of standard questions, but were encouraged to elaborate and discuss their own ideas and interpretations of how they use Facebook, how they present themselves and read (interpret) the profiles and self-representation of others.

314 K. Hillis, *Digital Sensations*, p. 352.

in relationship to consumer culture and that the online environment is becoming increasingly commodified.³¹⁵ An example on Facebook is how users are able to “like” (which shares this information to their friends as well as the general public) the Facebook pages of companies and businesses. Researchers often express concern at how young people can become the unwitting target of marketing tactics, though users themselves never seem to express any concern or problem with selling themselves as a product or endorsing other products or businesses.³¹⁶

Media productions, such as user created content on the Internet, create identities through the user’s reflexivity of self. This reflexivity of self is present in both the process and the final products of media production. Users who create content on the Internet are forced to perceive themselves through the eyes of others, in order to modify their self-representations. Of course there are many aspects of identification that the user may not be aware of, but through feedback or audience response they will inevitably reshape how they see themselves and how they think they are perceived.³¹⁷ The feedback loop is particularly prominent on Facebook as users can “like” each others updates, photos or comments – the more “likes” a thing gets, the more the user is likely to provide their audience with similar things, arguably changing their own taste in the process. Those who do not share or do share and do not receive positive feedback (in the form of “likes”, shares or comments on Facebook) will either become disillusioned with the site and not visit it or abstain from sharing more information in the future and eventually delete their profile or remain passive lurkers.

As digital communication technology has become more and more ingrained into all aspects of our lives, be they social, cultural, individual or collective, they have changed the way we experience and perceive places, people and time. Technological change

315 R. Willet, *Constructing the Digital Tween: Market Forces, Adult Concerns and Girl’s Interests*. – *Seven Going on Seventeen: Tween Culture in Girlhood Studies*. Eds. C. Mitchell, J. Reid-Walsh. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005.

316 d. boyd, *Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites*, pp. 119–142.

317 D. Buckingham, *Youth, Identity, and Digital Media*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008.

has always brought about cultural reordering as new experiences change the way we see the world around us and ourselves. Of course technology has long been burdened with the technologically determinist idea that it should make our lives better and that the negative effects are largely ignored as they are seen as simply a side effect of progress. In our technologically minded culture, sometimes even questioning the effects of technology is held in contempt and those who question modern relationships between man and technology are dismissed as luddites or technophobes.

Communication technologies on one hand are products that are sold to us, that have convinced us that we are better off with them than without them. Social media platforms are the newest global social phenomena that has changed the way people interact with each other. Social media platforms such as Facebook are private companies that profit from advertising to the users of the site, and from selling the user's personal information to advertisers. The website therefore is constantly urging the user to give more information about themselves. Not only personal statistics like where they were born, all the places they studied or worked, a list of their friends and family, businesses or entertainment they "like" but, also urges them to share any given moment what they think or feel on their status update.

One of the key findings of this study, which utilized virtual ethnographic research methods to discover how artists use Facebook, is the steady pace of identity renegotiation. The interviewed artists, vocalized a significant change in the way they presented themselves and interacted with others over time compared to when they first joined the social network. Posting content that was deemed appropriate and fun to share in the beginning, became more censored, less personal and, professionally oriented in the end. A parallel story to the artist's experience of Facebook as a place of self-promotion instead of unfettered self-expression is Facebook's own growth process as a commercial, openly traded company. Facebook's short history began in 2004 as a Harvard University social networking website, which spread to other Ivy League universities before going international in 2005. In October of 2007 Facebook had 50 million active users, by 2008 the

company had almost doubled their number of users to 90 million.³¹⁸ As of 2014 Facebook claims to have 1.35 billion active users.³¹⁹

With the exploding popularity of the website, came the expanding size of a user's own personal network (number of friends) – which led to a renegotiation of identity communication strategies for some users. Which may explain why a certain amount of self-censoring and holding back will inevitably exist on social networks and why people who work in creative industries may utilize Facebook as more of a tool for self-promotion, rather than self-expression and interpersonal communication with others. According to Foucault, this is how modern social relationships replace the traditional structures of power, of telling people how to socially conform and regulate themselves. Foucault believed that the modern world experienced a shift in power structures, where once external agencies such as the church or governments exerted control or power over individuals, the power shifted to social relationships and individuals having to self-regulate and self-censor in order to be socially accepted and fit into norms.³²⁰ As people write themselves into being³²¹ on social networking sites the discourse on self-identity, presentation of self, performance and the reflexive self are all brought into new light as they are acted out in a new medium.

318 J. Smith, Mapping Facebook's Growth Over Time. InsideFacebook. 2008, <http://www.insidefacebook.com/2008/08/19/mapping-facebook-growth-over-time/> (accessed 8 April 2015).

319 Number of monthly active Facebook users worldwide as of 4th quarter 2014 (in millions). – Statista 2014, <http://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide> (accessed 8 April 2015).

320 M. Foucault, Technologies of the Self.

321 d. boyd, Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites, pp. 119–142.

7. **Artists and Digital Culture: (the strain of) Self-Promotion in Social Media**³²²

7.1. Abstract

The topic of digital identity is gaining greater academic attention with the increasing popularity of user created Internet content (referred to as Web 2.0) and social media networks. A seismic technological and cultural shift occurred with the rise of digital culture, where perceived relevance and meaning shifted from something that solely existed in the corporal, or real, world to the increasing importance or perceived relevance of information found on the Internet. These emerging forms of communication and social interaction have placed media theorists in new frontiers of interdisciplinary research to understand and explain the phenomena. In our technologically determinist culture, we increasingly depend on digital media for validating offline information, which places us in a paradigmatic shift where the offline (real) loses importance while the online (virtual) gains meaning.

It can be argued that virtual existence via digital identity has become exponentially popular because of a culture that associates technology with progress, while largely ignoring the social ramifications and the effects on the individual, in our new media ecology. This study merges theoretical sources on the discussion of digital identity in such fields as: media ecology, virtual ethnography, narrative identity theory and the philosophy of technology with qualitative research on how artists associated with the Estonian Academy of Arts or the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, utilize social media networks like Facebook to negotiate a professional and social reputation.

7.2. Nobody Knows You're A Dog: Authenticity Online



"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

Figure 5. Peter Steiner, *The New Yorker* (1993)

The most reproduced *New Yorker* cartoon, that amused and intrigued cultural researchers over the last decade, was first published on July 3, 1993. It was a single panel cartoon by Peter Steiner that portrayed two dogs talking, one sitting behind the computer, the other on the floor. The caption read, "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog".³²³ The cartoon has been interpreted in many different ways, some have viewed it as a snapshot in time that managed to capture the moment the Internet became entwined in our lives as well as our sense of self-identity. Others have mused that it portrayed the historical shift that took place in the early 1990s when the Internet went from being confined

323 R. Steiner, *On the Internet nobody knows you're a dog*.

to the domain of business, governments and universities to being available and accessible to the general public, literally anyone and their dog. Other interpretations of the cartoon, bring us back in communication history to the early Internet and pre-Internet ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network) phenomena of MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons), which were text based, fantasy role playing environments that gave early Internet users the ability to alter their identity by creating new personas and new characters to interact with others online.³²⁴

In the beginning there was the “handle” an alias that was used in interactive settings like MUDs and Usenet newsgroups, a different form of authenticity and self-representation than what we are used to today in social networks. Facebook’s system of only officially allowing “authentic” accounts has been a topic of criticism – which some have referred to as an identity lock-in³²⁵ or a form of radical transparency.³²⁶ As Mark Zuckerberg, Facebook’s CEO, stated in 2009: “You have one identity... The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly... Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity”³²⁷ Zuckerberg’s definition of user authenticity on Facebook is black and white, you are either authentic or you are not, you have integrity or you do not. However things were not always seen this way.

The concept of user authenticity and misrepresentation, or playing with self-representation on the Internet has been portrayed as being problematic by some (such as Mark Zuckerberg), and therapeutic by others (such as Sherry Turkle).³²⁸ The idea that you are who you say you are online and that a person essentially “types themselves into being”³²⁹ is facilitated by the nature of the environment, where identity information does not exist in

324 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

325 N. Carr, *The Shallows*.

326 D. Brin, *The Transparent Society*.

327 D. Kirkpatrick, *The Facebook Effect*.

328 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

329 J. Sundén, *Material Virtualities*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.

the corporal sense and instead must be communicated through other mediums, such as text, photo, video, audio and so forth. In real life, identity information is multi-sensory – we read others through their physical characteristics (sex, race, age, size, clothing, tools and accessories), their movements, mannerisms and expressions – all this information is communicated before anyone even opens their mouth. Another level of identity information can be communicated on the oral-aural level, such as tone of voice, language spoken, accent and choice of words.

The phenomena of computer users creating virtual representation of themselves on the Internet led to a myriad of terms used to capture, describe and analyse the activity. Terms such as *digiSelf*, online identity, digital identity, virtual self, and cyberself were discussed by Internet researchers in the 1990s. The idea of a cybernetic fusion between man and machine led to speculation on everything from cyborgs to “computer cross-dressing.”³³⁰ One of the first explorers in the new field of social research, who picked up on the new phenomena of identity play of individual users in MUDs, was Sherry Turkle in her 1995 work, “Life on Screen”.³³¹ The Internet researchers of the 1990s explored the idea of using computers to renegotiate our identity, which was done by applying earlier identity theories and post-modern philosophy into interpreting everyday social practices online. The post-modern belief of pluralism, or “incredulity towards meta-narratives”³³² was applied to identity as not a singular, fixed entity but instead consisting of multiple personas, identity as being fragmented³³³ and identity as liquid.³³⁴ Identity was discussed as something that required tailoring to appropriately pass in different situations and contexts – such as interpersonal interactions or different social environments.³³⁵

330 D. Trend, *Reading Digital Culture*. London: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.

331 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

332 J. F. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

333 A. Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity*.

334 M. Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*.

335 E. Goffman, *Stigma*.

In this sense, self-presentation was metaphorically referred to as performance, adopting terms from dramaturgy such as actor, stage and audience. Erving Goffman used micro-sociology to describe self-presentation in everyday life, using the smallest change in facial expression in the context of human interactions as part of different stages (audiences), which demanded different performances from the actors. Goffman referred to such stages as; front stage (public), back stage (private) and off stage or side stage (to confidants).³³⁶ Kenneth Burke, a literary theorist and philosopher, referred to his social rhetorics and study of communication as dramatism.³³⁷ Burke's dramatisic pentad consists of: act, scene, agent, agency and purpose, has been compared to Marshall McLuhan's sense of figure and ground (a phenomenological approach to medium and context), which McLuhan adapted from Gestalt psychology.³³⁸ Ernest Becker, a prominent cultural anthropologist also used dramatisic terms to describe the roles that are socially constructed and culturally enforced that lead to states of anxiety and self-disconnection, that ultimately stem from a denial of death.³³⁹ The theatric or dramatisic approach to language, applied to self-identity and self-representation, are nothing new and have been discussed since the Socratic Dialogues and Plato's discussion of "the great stages of human life" in *The Philebus* to Shakespeare's musing on the different acts in human life as the theatre stage.³⁴⁰

The cultural and social theories of the pre-Internet, pre-personal computer, "electric age"³⁴¹ are often discussed when analysing life online and when examining identity negotiation and authenticity and its relevance in virtual environments. In many ways these dramatisic self-representation and identity theories set a methodological language, with terms like "performance" and "audiences"

336 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

337 K. Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*. University of California Press, 1969.

338 E. McLuhan, P. Zhang, *Pivotal Terms in Media Ecology*.

339 E. Becker, *The Birth and Death of Meaning*.

340 *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*.

341 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

often used in social media contexts.³⁴² The social media user can be seen as a performer who has easy access to tools of mass communication, to an unlimited worldwide audience of Internet users – or a micro-public of curated “friends” on networks like Facebook. The audience can dictate or shape the behaviour of the social media user. Though there are certain discomforts in mixed audiences – when it is a collection of individuals who do not necessarily know each other, have common interests or interact in real life. A haphazard mix of friends, family, co-workers, school mates, acquaintances, friends of friends, private businesses and strangers are often thrown into a homogenous mass audience – which can lead to a communication breakdown or self-censorship as the performer (social media user) may find themselves unable to customize their performance to that audience.

The following interview excerpts are from a qualitative study on social network use, “Artists, Identity and Facebook 2012”. These interviews were conducted with artists, all of whom were or currently are associated with the Estonian Academy of Arts or the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre between May and August of 2012. The interviews were conducted in face-to-face conversations, which were audio recorded and transcribed. The subjects were asked the same set of standard questions, but were encouraged to elaborate and discuss their own ideas and interpretations of how they use Facebook, how they present themselves and read (interpret) the profiles and self-representation of others. All the subjects interviewed lived in Estonia at the time of the study, although not all subjects are Estonian nationals. Because of the small population of Estonia (approximately 1.3 million people) and relatively small population of artists associated with the academies, the age and nationality of the interview subjects have not been provided, to ensure their promised anonymity.

I like the pluralism of Facebook, because this is the idea of Facebook. For example if I’m interested in the art scene, or something different – I still like seeing lots of different things that

are going on, on my Facebook wall. And I'm not stressed about people putting pictures of "her giving birth" and the babies. Why not? It always gives you something to talk about, how people are crazy and annoying. People are what they are, and you can't change them – you can just observe them. And if they like to put things like that, they are that kind of person who likes to share that kind of information. But this is information for me, about them (Artist, male).

The identity narrative, when mediated through social networks, often takes the shape of a "status update" or a "post" which when collected together over time, can represent many fragmented, short stories about the self. These autobiographical narratives blur the line between authenticity and relevance, as self-presentation to a mass audience can amplify distortion, with subjective truths, abstract symbolism, group identity, and "meaning making" differing even within a select audience of Facebook friends. Authenticity and integrity become complex when dealing with subjective, abstract notions such as self-identity and identity narratives. It is a generally held belief in narrative studies that every person has their story – and that the absence of this story results in confusion and chaos – for example, those who suffer from memory loss and are unable to remember who they are and what their life story is.³⁴³ A three-pillar approach is acknowledged for one to socially exist and to interact with others – identity, memory and narrative.³⁴⁴ Creating authenticity in an online environment is merely a mediate, virtual form of identity formation and communication – where identity narratives have become content for social media networks such as Facebook, as well as blogging platforms like Blogger and Wordpress, and micro-blogging at Twitter.

343 J. Brockmeier, L.-C. Hyden, *Health, Illness and Culture*.

344 P. J. Eakin, *Living Autobiographically*.

7.3. The Ungooglable Man: Relevance Online



Figure 6. Roz Chast, *The New Yorker* (2010)

If Peter Steiner's "On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog"³⁴⁵ captured the zeitgeist of a culture about to turn digital in 1993, Roz Chast's 2010 one panel cartoon represents where we find ourselves now, in a new era of digital dependence. The Ungooglable Man was published on April 8, 2010, in the *New Yorker*.³⁴⁶ It depicts a man walking down a sidewalk, the man, though attired normally, looks a little disturbed – he has stubble on his chin and his eyes are open a little too wide, his mouth pinched in a grimace. The caption reads "The Ungooglable Man" and captions dart around him, sensationalist in style, like headlines in pulp fiction: "Even the most powerful search engines cannot detect him!"

345 R. Steiner, *On the Internet nobody knows you're a dog*.

346 R. Chast, *The Ungooglable Man Cartoon*, *The New Yorker* 8 April 2010.

another headline reads “No Facebook page... No Myspace page... No Nothing!” the last headline concludes “And yet He Walks Amongst Us!” The man walking down the street is depicted as an anomaly, the fact that no search engine can find any information about his existence and no social network has him as a user – creates an existential crisis: Can he really exist? If there are no traces of his existence on the Internet, how can he exist at all? The fact he can still “walk amongst us” creates an almost ghost-like existence: where he is both seen and unseen, real and unreal – satirically speaking, an abomination of nature.

The cartoon captures an apt observation of our current culture of digitized relevance and how we increasingly depend on digital media for validating offline information. This is not just checking who individuals are, but also, to a much larger extent, about businesses and organizations. Websites that offer a platform for users to write and read reviews, for example Yelp, allow people to review (warn or endorse) businesses like restaurants and other service industries. Other user review websites, like Tripadvisor, allow users to rate their trips and vacations, by giving reviews of hotels, restaurants and travel destinations. In our social media age, businesses who have a high rating (of positive reviews) will proudly display their Tripadvisor ranking in their place of business as it lends their business a sense of prestige, relevance and authenticity.

The irony in this situation is that this particular form of authenticity and relevance is very easily manipulated by any party with a vested interest. This shift of perceived relevance stems from the growing trend of basing our knowledge and trust in the online world of user created content, whether in the form of hotel reviews on Tripadvisor or professional qualifications listed on Linked-In. The need to validate offline, “real life” information, on the Internet is part of a larger cultural transformation in what is perceived as important, prestigious and authentic as opposed to what is perceived as dubious, dangerous or a scam. This places us in a paradigmatic shift where the offline world (the real) loses importance while the online world (the virtual) gains perceived meaning and relevance. It can be argued that virtual existence via

digital identity has become exponentially more popular because of a culture that associates technology with progress with a cult-like following of trends in technological tools and social media platforms. The social ramifications of media effects are rarely discussed or understood. Media ecologists and Marxist theory would describe this drive as a “push” on the consumers rather than following the classic “supply and demand”. Finding a use for things we never asked for or wanted, and didn’t know we needed, is arguably part of the technological imperative.

Even though the Chinese discovered gunpowder first they chose not to develop the gun. China at that time had different ideologies, new technology was viewed as a threat not an opportunity.³⁴⁷ The occidental way of thinking however has always been regarded as being ideologically rooted in the technological imperative. An idea that much like evolution, all new technology must be developed to have a maximum impact, which is regarded as progress.³⁴⁸

The technological imperative, or inevitability thesis, is an idea in the philosophy of technology that once a tool is introduced into a culture, it cannot be removed or stopped.³⁴⁹ During the interviews with artists and academics about how they use Facebook, the dissatisfaction with Facebook as a tool of communication was expressed rather explicitly:

I don’t even use (Facebook) as a networking place, I’m just part of other people’s network (Artist, male).

However, no matter how “useless” a person found Facebook to be for them, they had no plan to delete their profiles and leave the social networking site, as they saw Facebook as an uncomfortable necessity, something they were a part of, whether they liked it or not.

Another idea in the philosophy of technology and media

347 L. Thurow, *The Future of Capitalism: How today’s economic forces shape tomorrow’s world*. New York: Penguin, 1996.

348 M. Shallis, *The Silicon Idol: The Micro Revolution and its Social Implications*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

349 D. Chandler, *Technological or Media Determinism*. 18 September 1995, <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/tecdet/tecdet.html> (accessed 8 April 2015).

ecology that could explain the perceived need or relevance to make use of something we do not necessarily want or need is explained by the theory of technological determinism. Technology's ability to influence how we think, feel, view and interact with others is the foundation for technological led theories of social change. As the guru of the electric age Marshall McLuhan succinctly noted, we make our tools and then our tools make us.³⁵⁰ In historical contexts we understand how the technology of past eras reshaped everything from the daily life of the individual to more sweeping social and cultural shifts. A well-known example being the social and cultural changes that occurred around the time of the Gutenberg press and mechanical (movable) type. The Gutenberg press has been referred to as an agent of change, as it ushered in a new era, with a shift from an oral-aural, non-literate culture to literacy, mass publishing and a spread of printed materials (such as The Gutenberg Bible) which created new standards, norms and ideas.³⁵¹

Technological determinism can be further subcategorized into hard determinism, soft determinism, technology as neutral and technology as non-neutral. These four sub-theories are part of a larger analytical approach when attempting to measure or describe the influence or effects of technology on the individual and society.³⁵² The only difference between hard or soft technological determinism and technology as a neutral container being varying degrees of perceived autonomy or free will of man when interacting with technology, which can be problematic as tools insist on being used in specific ways.³⁵³

The opposing idea is that technology is neutral, which is to say technology is not inherently good or bad – but it is in how we use it that determines its meaning and effects. For example, a knife being able to spread butter on a piece of bread or stab and possibly kill another human being. However, though technically the use of

350 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

351 E. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press...*

352 N. Postman, *Technopoly*.

353 A. Mowshowitz, *The Conquest of Will: Information Processing in Human Affairs*. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1976.

a tool or technology as neutral can be demonstrated, for instance, using a gun to keep peace, as apposed to wreak havoc, the theory of technology as neutral largely ignores cultural symbolism, human cognitive grasps and other contextual and social factors.

When dealing with meaning and culture, we must shift our focus from demanding explanations (like causes) which stand in the way of understanding how human beings interpret their worlds and how we interpret their acts of interpretation.³⁵⁴

The way that technology, in this case social media networks such as Facebook, can affect our perception or interpretation of the world around us, and how we view ourselves (our self-identity) is demonstrated satirically in Roz Chast's "Ungoogable Man".³⁵⁵ Where human existence in the real world has taken a backseat to Internet representation – a shift in the interpretation and understanding of who or what is relevant and who or what is real.

7.4. Self-Promotion and Self-Censorship Online

Both artists and academics acknowledged the construction of a digital identity online to be an essential part of the self-promotion required to add perceived value to their careers, and relevance within their own community.

Although academics may appear to be attached to older traditions, they are more accurately at the vanguard of this reconstruction of the way that information moves through a culture and its correlative reorganization of reputation, value and esteem.³⁵⁶

Much like artists, academics inhabit an environment where having a good reputation, being held in esteem by their peers and being recognized by their own community will construct their relevance and importance to the larger, general public. Social media

354 J. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, p. xiii.

355 R. Chast, *The Ungoogable Man*.

356 K. Barbour, P. D. Marshall, *Persona and the Academy*.

platforms have provided creative professionals and academics with a place to freely and instantly share their ideas and work, without being restricted by geographical and institutional limitations, such as exhibitions, conferences and publications.

When discussing the social media environment, and its effects on the users of social media – the private and public aspects are quite often addressed. The paradox of wanting privacy and publicity at the same time, is no longer restricted to the realms of famous celebrities and has now become the plight of every social media user as they struggle to receive the attention they crave while maintaining enough privacy to not feel invaded. In 2009 Facebook made it easier to leave other users positive feedback, in the most passive form possible: by pushing a “Like” button; there is no “Unlike” button.

But of course the desired effect, of sharing a photo or a profile picture, is the number of likes you can get (Artist, male).

The “Like” button motivates people to share more with each other in hopes of entertaining their audience and receiving positive reinforcement or reception of the content they posted, and in doing so, creating a sense of camaraderie or community.

The sharing of personal information in an online environment helps the Internet user to create an identity to enable social interaction or recognition. Perhaps it is the nature of the social web itself that offers a free (that is to say a no-charge) platform which provides a blank slate for Internet users to share their information about themselves on websites such as Facebook, Wordpress, Twitter, Blogspot and YouTube. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, provide their users with many different blanks to fill with their personal, real life information. These range from basic identity information like names and birth dates, to more detailed information about place of work, family relationships and friendships, as well as favourite consumer products, businesses, organizations and groups.

Self-promotion in social media can lead to relationship strains for the artists and academics who use Facebook as a platform to

share information and invite others to their public events and exhibitions. Facebook allows users to make their profile and event invitation pages either private or public. An invitation to a select group of “Friends” (a Facebook term for those allowed to view information) can cause certain tensions to arise when an individual does not receive the support they would like from their peer group. As one artist and academic explained, the new digital environment de-humanized and devalued an artist’s invitation to their event.

But really there is nothing useful (about Facebook) unless, maybe when I’m organizing something, then I can inform people. If I have an event, I can send invitations through Facebook. But still, for me, Facebook is not very useful in a sense, you send invitations to everybody, but it’s not like face to face communication and people know that. So you’re not sure if these people actually saw the invitation or if they saw it but just ignored it, they didn’t want to come. I feel in this sense Facebook is useless because it just gives people an excuse to avoid something if they don’t want to say “no” to your face. So, I feel that it makes things more complicated than they should be (Artist, female).

Another example of the strain of self-promotion in social media are the feelings of rejection or frustration when an invitation to an event, such as an exhibition, is ignored.³⁵⁷ The Facebook interface, such as the chat program, intensifies the problem, as it allows users to see who (of their friends) is online at any given point in time. This can lead to the situation where the artist sending the invitation becomes convinced that the invitation is being ignored not by mistake, but purposefully.

So sometimes I invite people (hesitating), for example, if I post some event that I have and then I can see who is online at the same time. So if I see these people don’t come to my event...

357 See Appendix A, Figure 14. Facebook Event Invitation.

Then I think you must have saw my invitation, why didn't you come, you know? (Artist, female)

The disappointment expressed by this particular artist at invitations to an exhibition not being accepted or even acknowledged – was a common theme in the questioning of the perceived bond or relationships between a Facebook user and their “Friends”. “Friends” is a slippery term, as it takes on different connotations in the social media or SNS (social networking site) context. Friends on SNSs are not the same as “friends” in the everyday sense; instead, Friends provide context by offering users an imagined audience to guide behavioural norms.³⁵⁸

The different types of relationships between users on social networking sites can be subcategorized into different groups such as close friends and family (that you actually have a personal relationship with) versus people with whom you have a real life connection (but not a personal relationship) to complete strangers. Friendship on social networking sites can be subcategorized into different reasons of why a particular person can be added or accepted as a Friend or contact. David Fono and Kate Raynes Goldie defined these friendships on LiveJournal (a social network that provides a platform for blogging and journaling) in the following terms: friendship as trust, friendship as courtesy, friendship as declaration and friendship as nothing. A trust friendship means trusting someone enough to view your personal information or profile, whereas friendship as declaration is more of a public demonstration of a relationship, that may have more significant meaning in offline contexts, e.g. a real life friendship.³⁵⁹

Accepting “Friend Requests” on Facebook, out of courtesy and not wanting to offend the person who extended the request can lead to situation where a Facebook user feels estranged from their own network. As their list of friends or contacts grow, the

358 d. boyd, N. Ellison, *Social network sites*, pp.210–230.

359 D. Fono, K. Raynes-Goldie, *Hyperfriendship and Beyond: Friendship and Social Norms on LiveJournal*. – *Internet Research Annual: Selected Papers from the Association of Internet Researchers Conference 2005*, Volume 4. Eds. M. Consalvo, C. Haythornthwaite. New York: Peter Lang, 2007, <http://k4t3.org/publications/hyperfriendship.pdf> (accessed 8 April 2015).

group can become more anonymous, which may result in an unease with the idea of sharing personal or trivial information with people whom you do not know, trust or feel comfortable around.

I used to share personal photos, but I don't anymore – as the circle has become bigger – I have over 500 friends, when I first started I had 100 close friends and so I shared more pictures, as you would among friends – but now I'm not so interested in sharing with everybody. I feel that for a lot of people, Facebook is for professional use, and they are maybe mixing their professional and personal life. The biggest private gallery (names gallery) has their own circle of artists who they work with: there are other private galleries but this one represents artists best. The two people who are the head of this gallery are extremely socially active, and I met one of them just once. Of course he knows me, because I'm an artist and he knows the Estonian art life, but suddenly he put me as one of his friends. Of course he wants to widen his professional and social scene, so of course I accepted. It's tactical – but maybe more for him. This is just one example but there is a lot of this happening, but it doesn't disturb me. It's just this kind of place, if I want I can share my photos and my private life in a different place (Artist, male).

The urge to share the private self, as an individual as opposed to a public or professional persona – is an experience that can place strain on artists who use Facebook as a professional networking platform. When the social network audience, which some referred to as “the circle” became too big and anonymous it dampened the urge to share more personal information. Some respondents noted that there are different parts of their personality that are mediated through Facebook, that if they are a shy and reserved person in real life – they act the same way on Facebook. And though being an artist involves public interaction in exhibitions, interviews and press coverage – it is never about their personal life, it is only about their professional life. The tabloid factor only appears when the artist's artwork is overshadowed by their own persona – when they become a celebrity in their own right.

7.5. Relevance by Association and Networked Publics

Another recurring theme that comes up with artists-academics when discussing how they read or interpret another individual's social networking profile, is the idea of relevance by association. That is to say, the belief that you can denote an individual's relevance within their own community (for example the Estonian art community) by seeing who is listed as a friend or contact on social networking sites.

The first thing I look at when looking at someone's profile on Facebook, is who our common friends are. This gives me a good idea because Estonia is so small. Maybe it's like this everywhere. I see who he knows and this gives me a good idea of what kind of person he is (Artist, male).

This interpretation of being able to "read" or interpret the identity of others in relation to their friends and associations, is commonly referred to as a "social identity" or "group identity" by media and cultural researchers.³⁶⁰ Group affiliation or cohesiveness and interpersonal ties can influence the perceived relevance, authenticity or importance of a user by other social network users. These friendships or connections may only exist online, as declarations of belonging to certain social circles of artists, galleries, curators, critics and academics.

Facebook users in this study, mostly articulated an understanding that the main use of social networking sites are decidedly professionally oriented, and not a network for private individuals to keep in touch with friends and family and other offline "real life" contacts, though there were many instances where professional and private personas would overlap. When a social network user connects and presents themselves to an audience or network of "relevant associates" that does not necessarily match the users

360 F. Zeng, L. Huang, W. Dou, Social Factors in User Perception and Responses to Advertising in Online Social Networking Communities. *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 2009, Vol. 10, No. 10, <http://jiad.org/article121.html> (accessed 8 April 2015).

offline, “real life” social group, we can see how a communication tool has restructured human interaction. Or at the very least social networks can be seen as platforms to demonstrate social and professional allegiances. This phenomenon, has been referred to by cultural researchers as “networked publics”, which can be defined as publics that are restructured by network technology.³⁶¹

The “Artists, Identity and Facebook 2012” qualitative study utilized an ethnographic approach to find out how artists associated with Estonian art and music academies interpret and construct identity information on Facebook. The problems, or strains, associated with self-promotion in social media were felt mostly in relation to establishing relevance within a community of peers and having to censor themselves in order to construct a public persona that would engage, or not offend, their networked public. Which is of course only one example of how social media networks have brought about cultural transformations that have restructured our social and professional relationships and our sense of self.

361 d. boyd, *Social Network Sites as Networked Publics*, pp. 39–58.

8. Privacy Experiments in Public and Artistic Space³⁶²

8.1. Abstract

This article focuses on the comparison of two phenomena: “Memopol” (2010) an interactive installation by Estonian artist Timo Toots (1982) and the National ID Card and Public Transport Card system currently in place in Tallinn, Estonia. These geographically specific examples are a small part of a larger global discourse on questioning the line between what is public and what is private. Artistic projects such as “Memopol” have reframed problematic issues that characterize our modern age of surveillance society and digital technology, while raising pertinent questions about the blurry line between what is considered personal information versus public information. Increasing advances in surveillance technology in both the public and private sector, as well as social and cultural shifts brought about by digital media have created more accepting paradigms about privacy. This perception shift has been communicated in artworks, which is an example of how the topic has entered the public sphere.

8.2. “Memopol” and The Obligatory Estonian National ID Card

“Memopol” won the Prix of Golden Nica in 2012 at the Ars Electronica Festival on Art, Technology and Society in Linz, Austria. In both of Timo Toots’s installations, “Hall of Fame” (2009) and “Memopol” art and technology, and issues on privacy versus public information are presented to the audience in an accessible

362 R. Kelomees, S. Koosel, (Forthcoming / under review) *Surveillance & Society*, Kingston: Queen’s University, 2015.

yet provocative way. The projects capture generalizations about contemporary fears and concerns, characterized by citizens of democratic nations finding themselves living in a surveillance society. “Hall of Fame” and “Memopol” make this situation visually explicit and reformulate it ironically.

“Hall of Fame” was a prototype of “Memopol”, and was built around the use of the Estonian ID-card. The Estonian ID-card is a photo-ID card that contains a microchip, all Estonian citizens and permanent residents are legally obliged to possess such a card from the age of 15. Since Estonia’s accession to the European Union in 2004, the Estonian ID-card has become the official primary identification card in Estonia. It is recognized as an official travel document within the borders of the European Union and the Schengen Zone. Signing legal documents such as contracts and bank loans remotely have been made possible in Estonia since March of 2000, when the law was passed enabling the use of the Estonian-National ID card for digital signatures. The ID card is also used for authentication in Estonia’s unique Internet-based voting program. Estonian citizens can access their bank accounts, sign legal documents online and send the digi-signed documents via e-mail or use online portals with digital-signatures – eliminating the need for physical identification and manual signatures.

Timo Toots’ interactive digital art installation “Memopol” is an apparatus presented as a machine that measures its user’s so-called digital footprint using their National ID-Card and password codes, to search the Internet utilizing private businesses and social networks (Facebook) along with various official national databases and registries for relevant information which it then visualizes using an animation sequence on a public screen. “Memopol” invites visitors into a dystopian world, where technology has unlimited potential to gather and store information about them – every detail of their life is known, from how many friends they have, to the final grades of their high school exams.

Toots’s fictional city Memopolis demonstrates controversial application possibilities and increasing degrees of digital control on the Internet. Liberated from secrets, since every expression

of life becomes data, the citizens of Memopolis are perfect, absolutely transparent and kept alive by the flow of information. Data streams open up inexorable, untapped territories of the public and private spheres in order to anticipate and eliminate social defects. Automated monitoring structures become higher moral authorities in the evaluation and regulation of actions and thoughts. Memopolis gives shape to the foreboding notion that modern technology, using data available on the Internet, already has enabled the realisation of the wildest fantasies of categorization.³⁶³

“Memopol” has been presented at international exhibitions with different audiences and can utilize different national identification documents to tell stories about the people who possess them. Although it can be an interactive artwork, which functions with the audience and exhibition space, the project can also be interpreted as an Internet project, online artwork.

8.3. The Estonian Paradox: How the Digital Age is More Invasive Than the KGB

Public opinion and media discourse on surveillance and invasions of privacy varies from country to country, as different historical backgrounds can create different social and cultural contexts. Estonia was under Soviet occupation from 1940-1991, fifty-one years under the oppressive Soviet system and human rights violations by the KGB, left its mark on the small Baltic country. However, a culture of conspiracy beliefs and reading between the lines is mixed with a keen interest in information technology and the national pride associated with being an eState with eBusiness, eVoting and ePolice.³⁶⁴

363 Timo Toots – Memopolis. Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art 12 December 2012, http://www.edith-russ-haus.de/no_cache/en/exhibitions/exhibitions/archive.html?tx_kdvzerhapplications_pi4%5Bexhibition%5D=156&tx_kdvzerhapplications_pi4%5Baction%5D=show&tx_kdvzerhapplications_pi4%5Bcontroller%5D=Exhibition (accessed 8 April 2015).

364 Vabariigi Valitsus, The Government of the Republic of Estonia’s Website, <http://valitsus.ee/en/government/e-estonia> (accessed 20 August 2013).

Estonia refers to itself as an eState, where everything from voting in political elections to doctor's prescriptions and taxes can all be done online. The surprising paradox is that despite living under harmful and dangerous government surveillance for fifty-one years, surveillance tools are currently much more implemented and accepted than they were during the Soviet occupation.

It has been acknowledged by the Estonian media that identifying technologies such as the National ID Card and the (free) Public Transit System card, have greatly increased previous government capabilities of surveillance and potential conflicts of interest between the private sector, the public sector and citizens. Many journalists have questioned the privacy threats of recording routine activities such as when and where Tallinn city residents use the public transit system.³⁶⁵

Even more criticism has risen in the Estonian press and courts, due to the insecure storage of public transport users information that was demonstrated to be easily accessed (with security holes) and stored for several years.³⁶⁶

The repercussions of such findings will likely have an effect on those who are uncomfortable with the identifying and information storage systems currently in place. However, to what extent citizens will modify their behaviour due to perceived privacy invasion have yet to be documented. Artistic positions and practices allow the public to question accepted solutions about public information and personal data management. Artistic experiments in the public sphere, such as Toots's "Memopol" could be used as tests and sources of research into public behaviour and contemporary habits in urban environment.

365 H. Lõugas, Tallinna ühiskaardile laaditud raha on kaaperdatav. Eesti Päevaleht 15 January 2013, <http://www.epl.ee/news/eesti/taismahus-tallinna-uhiskaardile-laaditud-raha-on-kaaperdatav.d?id=65530458> (accessed 8 April 2015).

366 H. Lõugas, Tallinna ühiskaardile laaditud raha... T. Jõesaar, Kohtuotsus: ühiskaardiga pole vaja piiksutada. – Eesti Ekspress 26 April 2013, <http://www.epl.ee/news/eesti/kohtuotsus-uhiskaardiga-pole-vaja-piiksutada.d?id=66033990> (accessed 8 April 2015).

8.4. Technological Determinism's Effects on the Surveillance Society

A theory in the philosophy of technology and the study of media ecology that seeks to explain the phenomena that happens when a technology or tool can be introduced into a culture or society – but can not be removed, is referred to as the technological imperative or the inevitability thesis. The inevitability thesis states that any particular tool or technology, once introduced and adopted will inevitably be developed – with little regard for the needs or wants of the particular society it is being developed for.³⁶⁷ Technology as an abstract notion is seen as progress and as something for the greater good in a technological utopianist society. Technology's ability to influence how we think, feel, view the world around us, could explain the perceived need or relevance to make use of a tool we do not necessarily want or need.

Technological determinism can be further subcategorized into hard determinism, soft determinism, technology as neutral and technology as non-neutral. These four sub-theories are part of a larger analytical approach when attempting to measure or describe the influence or effects of technology on the individual and society.³⁶⁸

The difference between hard, soft or neutral technological determinism being varying degrees of perceived autonomy of the user when utilizing technology. Hard technological determinism states that tools insist on being used in specific ways and that we as individuals are influenced by cultural, social or even commercial pressures to use tools of technology the way they are “supposed” to be used.³⁶⁹ A theory that opposes technological determinism is the idea of technology as neutral, that technology is not inherently good or bad – but instead how the tool is used that determines its meaning and effects. Technology as neutral can be demonstrated, for example with the uses of a gun – and

367 D. Chandler, *Technological or Media Determinism*.

368 N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

369 A. Mowshowitz, *The Conquest of Will*.

how it can be used ethically or unethically. However the theory of technology as neutral largely ignores cultural symbolism, human cognitive grasps and other contextual and social factors. Tools of surveillance and means of storing personal data about individuals can be discussed in the same way, whether the technology insists on being used – and being used in particular ways to further reveal the ethical dimensions of privacy invasions.

8.5. “Hall of Fame” and “Memopol”: Estonian State Portal and X-Road

One of the success stories of the advances of information technology in Estonia is the Estonian State Portal (www.eesti.ee) – which among other uses, collects large amounts of personal data about citizens which is then made available on the Internet. Toots points out that it may not yet be technically possible to create an apparatus like “Memopol” in other countries. The name of the device “Memopol 1 Social Machine that Maps Your Information Field” is written in Cyrillic, as a reference to the concept of “Big Brother” in George Orwell’s dystopian classic, 1984.³⁷⁰ The retro-futuristic graphic design of the various text fields were designed by Martin Rästa. Another source of inspiration for Toots was the so-called X-Road:

The X-Road was launched in 2001. The data exchange layer X-Road is a technical and organizational environment, which enables secure Internet-based data exchange between the state’s information systems...The X-Road allows institutions/people to securely exchange data as well as to ensure people’s access to the data maintained and processed in state databases...Public and private sector enterprises and institutions can connect their information system with the X-Road. This enables them to use X-Road services in their own electronic

370 O. Laas. MEMOIOJI II: AN ATTEMPT AT CLOSE READING.– For Artishok Biennale, <http://works.timo.ee/memopol2-an-attempt-at-close-reading> (accessed 8 April 2015).

environment or offer their e-services via the X-Road. In case of citizens, the X-Road enables using the services of the X-Road via different portals. That includes making enquiries from state databases and to control the information related to the person himself/herself. Officials can use the services intended for them (for instance document exchange center) in the information systems of their own institutions. This facilitates the officials' work, since it avoids the labour-consuming processing of paper documents, large-scale data entry and data verification. Communication with other officials, entrepreneurs and citizens is faster and more accurate.³⁷¹

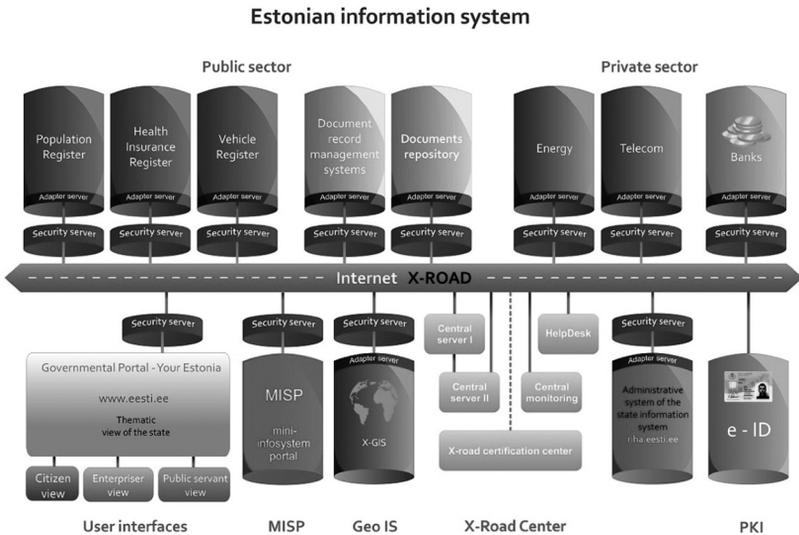


Figure 7. Estonian Information System. X-Road

It is not news that several technological innovations such as bank cards, ID cards, mobile phones, and social networks, have changed the ways data can be collected about people. Data collections of information about citizens has existed since the dawn of

371 Republic of Estonia Information System Authority, Data Exchange Layer X-Road. Added 13 February 2006. Updated 17 December 2013. <https://www.ria.ee/x-road> (accessed 8 April 2015).

civilization. However, new technological innovations enable more powerful tools to traces and store personal information, that can easily reveal an individuals habits and online behaviour. The data an individual leaves unknowingly and unwillingly in the public sphere can be misused and result in unwanted consequences, that can range from invasions of personal privacy to identity theft.

Timo Toots “Hall of Fame” and both versions of “Memopol” worked in same way: after passing an Estonian National ID-card or passport on the reader, and PIN number of the National ID-card, the open source software ran through networks, search engines and governmental databases for information about the document owner. Afterwards the acquired information was projected onto several information windows of the installation: address, place of birth, health data, criminal record, car registration number, amount of friends (on Facebook), bank account number, income and estimated year of death was shown. The last fact made the installation frightening, and might have been a deciding factor for visitors who refuse to participate with the installation, and keep their identity card in their wallet. After the data was collected, a portrait of the user is displayed in the installation’s screens. The “Memopol” user goes from being merely an exhibition visitor to being exposed as a part of the public and private system of personal information aggregation, as well as a part of the artwork. “Мемопол-II”, is the artists direct criticism towards the Estonian government’s policy to make information about their citizens available online.

Timo Toots:

“Мемопол-II” was inspired by eesti.ee. As in Europe is going on intensive debate about privacy, then in Estonia it has not yet begun. In same time we are moving faster in digitalisation. It is supported by our small population and low moral standards (see article by Gustav Lauringson in Eesti Ekspress³⁷²).

372 G. Lauringson, Tehnoloogiline radikalism ja Eesti ühiskonna vaim. – Eesti Ekspress 15 September 2011, <http://www.ekspress.ee/news/arvamus/arvamus/gustav-lauringson-tehnoloogiline-radikalism-ja-est-uhiskonna-vaim.d?id=57770578> (accessed 8 April 2015).

Centralization of all information open different doors, which could be positive and negative. In contemporary more or less peaceful situation eesti.ee, Facebook and Google are pleasant and convenient tools. As political wind turns, same tools could become instruments for perpetrators. For acknowledging such tendencies “Memopol-II” was created.³⁷³

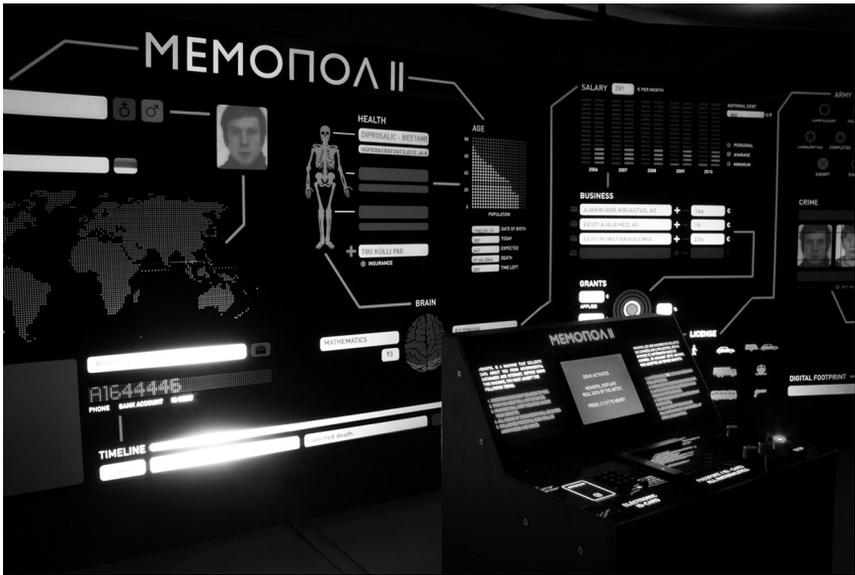


Figure 8. Timo Toots “Memopol”

“Hall of Fame” and “Memopol”, share many similarities but there are some notable differences. “Hall of Fame” was the prototype for “Memopol”, which was described by Timo Toots on his website:

“Hall of Fame” is an interactive installation that calculates visitor’s potential as an artist. The information on the chip of the national ID-card is read and simultaneously a photo of the document is captured by web camera. This is the way visitor can put oneself on the “Hall of Fame” (if one is “artistic”

373 M. Peegel, Timo Toots – memopoli linnapea. Eesti Päevaleht 15 October 2011, <http://www.epl.ee/news/kultuur/timo-toots-memopoli-linnapea.d?id=59850493> (accessed 8 April 2015).

enough to compete). The billboard starts a sequence showing the statistics gathered and calculated about the person. The animated sequence is projected on paper or spatial objects on the billboard. The equation consist of three main counterparts: fame, time till death, luck.³⁷⁴

When asked if “Memopol” was an upgrade version of “Hall of Fame” Timo Toots answered that:

“Memopol” is inspired from the “Hall of Fame”, but they are different. In “Hall of Fame” measuring of each other and playful aspect is most important. In “Memopol” it is irrelevant. “Memopol” is installed in private space, “Hall of Fame” in public space. In the same time common element are to catch the users into privacy traps. In “Memopol” privacy is exchanged with powerful visual experience about yourself, in “Hall of Fame” social positioning and status are brought up front.³⁷⁵

Both artistic projects have been exhibited at high profile, international events. “Hall of Fame” was shown at the European Media Art Festival 2011 in Osnabrück, Germany and “Memopol” was exhibited in an exhibition entitled “Gateways” at The Art Museum of Estonia (Kumu), in 2011 and the Ars Electronica Festival in 2012, where it won the “Golden Nica”, the Prix Ars Electronica in interactive art. There have been several articles written about the projects,³⁷⁶ a recommendable “close reading” by Oliver Laas states that “a great deal of the user data displayed by “Memopol” is primarily biopolitical.”³⁷⁷

Timo Toots’s projects address contemporary issues in visually

374 T. Toots, Hall of Fame. 2009, <http://works.timo.ee/autahvel> (accessed 8 April 2015).

375 Timo Toots’ e-mail to Raivo Kelomees in October 2011.

376 A. W, The machine that strolled among the corridors of memory. – Kunst.ee 2010, 3-4. R. Kelomees, Timo Tootsi auhinnatud mäletamismasin. – Eesti Ekspress 18 May 2012, <http://ekspress.delfi.ee/news/areen/timo-tootsi-auhinnatud-maletamismasin?id=64413138> (accessed 8 April 2015). R. Kelomees, Noore meediakunstimiku portree: interaktiivsus, suhestumisesteeetika ja vastutuse diagnostika. – Vikerkaar 2011, 10-11, pp. 164–165.

377 O. Laas. MEMOIOI II.

and technically refined form. Similar topics have been discussed in the digital art world, such as the Ars Electronica conference “Goodbye Privacy” in 2007. Toots visualizes inconvenient truths, which we have become accustomed and desensitize to the fact that the personal data of people on the Internet, can create both feelings of privacy invasion as well as the vulnerability of information finding itself in the wrong hands. In a wider sense, Toots’ projects question if this accumulation of knowledge and facts, availability and usability of information and increased ease of social communication has made us any happier. Information technology made it easier to collect and exchanging information, while making it hard to hide and keep information private. For individuals, the difficulty to keep their private information private can result in a lack of control over their own private lives, causing emotional stress, psychological or social anxieties and in worst case loss of property or life.

8.6. The Public Transport Card

The Public Transport Card is a new (implemented in January of 2013) contact-free ticket, which can be used to validate free travel on public transport for Tallinn city residents. It was intended to replace paper tickets, and provide free public transport to Tallinn city citizens officially registered in Tallinn. However the social project has been heavily discussed and criticized by the local media, which has led to conspiracy theories, in which the system is seen as a form of citizen surveillance or a political popularity tactic by the party who implemented the free ticket system. Although there is currently no public data available about the effect of the program, it is connected to the collecting and sharing of personal data, which is similar to Timo Toots’s projects, although the feedback screen for the validation of the ticket is hidden.

The Public Transportation Card in Tallinn is designed with RFID (Radio-frequency identification) technology, which allows it to identify its carrier without contact, in this case the person who owns the card. Using RFID tags is not new, there is promise

of a bright future for this technology, as the RFID tag allows quick self-identification of objects to which they are added. Reasons for their future implementation could be justified as they require less time, energy and expense in governing information traffic.



Figure 9. Validation of the Public Transportation Card

One reason for future implementation of RFID tags is the so-called “exaflood” or “data deluge” the explosion of the amount of data collected and exchanged. As the European Union document “Internet of Things 2020”³⁷⁸ states, the business forecasts indicate that by the year 2015 more than 220 Exabytes of data will be stored. As current network are ill-suited for this kind of exponential traffic growth, there is a need by all actors involved to re-think current networking and storage architecture. It will be imperative to find novel ways and mechanisms to find, fetch, and transmit data. One relevant reason for this data deluge is the

378 Internet of Things in 2020. A Roadmap for The Future, European Commission report. 5 September 2008, http://www.smart-systems-integration.org/public/documents/publications/Internet-of-Things_in_2020_EC-EPoSS_Workshop_Report_2008_v3.pdf (accessed 8 April 2015).

explosion in the number of devices collecting and exchanging information, as envisioned “The Internet of Things” becomes a reality. “The Internet of Things” is the concept that if things and object would have uniquely identifiable tags, there would be no need for human activity to register them, if they are identified and form virtual representation in an Internet-like structure. The term “Internet of Things” is attributed to Kevin Ashton, who used it for the first time in 1999, and later published an article “The Internet of Things” in 2009. The main point of Kevin Ashton’s article, is that vast amounts of data on the Internet are captured and created by humans:

Today computers – and, therefore, the Internet – are almost wholly dependent on human beings for information. Nearly all of the roughly 50 petabytes (a petabyte is 1,024 terabytes) of data available on the Internet were first captured and created by human beings – by typing, pressing a record button, taking a digital picture or scanning a bar code. Conventional diagrams of the Internet include servers and routers and so on, but they leave out the most numerous and important routers of all: people. The problem is, people have limited time, attention and accuracy – all of which means they are not very good at capturing data about things in the real world.³⁷⁹

As it is evident, RFID technology is not only useful for “things” but also for people. It is the easiest way to perform bio-political experiments with citizens and naturally they could be justified with public or economical interest for the improvement of transportation system or other public or private sector projects. How the situation will turn out in the end for the Tallinn Transportation Card, is not clear, but apparently it is becoming an important topic, as was predicted. Estonians are familiar with the surveillance state, because of their Soviet past (1940-1991), which means many Estonians today have lived for 50 year under a Big Brother like regime of the

379 K. Ashton, That ‘Internet of Things’ Thing: In the real world, things matter more than ideas. – RFID Journal 22 June 2009, <http://www.rfidjournal.com/articles/view?4986> (accessed 8 April 2015).

KGB (Committee for State Security). Which makes former Soviet citizens very sensitive to everything that reminds them of earlier fears about the previous state security regime, which is perhaps the main reason for the critical responses, and negative reactions to such technologies. The critical reception to the use of such technologies in the media has spread through print journalism and social media websites such as Facebook – where conspiracy theories can take on lives of their own.

8.7. Conspiracy Theories of the Tallinn Transportation Card

One conspiracy theory about the Tallinn Transportation Card, that is based on actual fact, is that the political party who is currently in power in Tallinn (The Centre Party) started the free city transport system with the intention of creating incentive for citizens to register themselves in Tallinn. More citizens registered as residents of Tallinn would of course mean more voters and tax payers registered in the municipality. A free public transport system naturally improves many citizens everyday lives, as once registered in the system and carrying the RFID card, they no longer have to buy public transport tickets. One reprehension is, that this free ticket system forces people to register themselves as inhabitants of the capital city Tallinn, this has been criticized in the press as a populist move by the current party (The Center Party) in charge of the municipal city government.

The Centre Party, although an Estonian party – with an Estonian leader, is associated with catering to the Russian segment of the population of Tallinn. The party is perceived as being pro-Russia, which creates a polarizing effect on the city population as this collides with anti-Russia attitude. At the same time the contactless ticket system has sparked debate in many other countries, including Belgium, Germany, and Finland. The political background of offering free public transportation includes many complexities. For example, the question of what is done with the data collected. The City government of Tallinn explained that their intentions of

collecting data was to improve the transportation network. It is contested with the fact that pensioners (retired people and those over 65 years of age) and mothers with small children do not need tickets – however the Deputy Mayor of Tallinn suggested that it would be nice if they would still validate their rides.³⁸⁰

Another conspiracy theory that has gained press and public attention, is a claim that the stored data gathered about an individuals commuting habits (recorded by the use of the Tallinn Transportation Card) are given to corresponding government institution for monitoring any particular citizens behaviour. Similar stories have been shared on social networking site Facebook, where a letter circulated (and was shared more than 4000 times) that somebody had overheard two women talking on a bus – one told the other that she had taken an official sick-leave from work that day, but still had some obligations and traveled using the Tallinn Transport Card.³⁸¹

Some time afterwards she realized that she had not received money from the Estonian Health Insurance Fund, for the days that she had been on sick leave. She called the officials at the Estonian Health Insurance Fund, to question why the insurance did not cover her on her sick leave days – and she was questioned in turn about where she has been on particular mornings in the last two weeks. This conspiracy story was later refuted, by the Health Insurance Fund. A representative from the Health Insurance Fund was quoted as saying, that the person in question, could have just been visiting their doctor, and that it is not possible for the Estonian Health Insurance Fund to know an individuals transportation histories.³⁸²

Although this particularly conspiracy theory had been disproved, the public consensus on the idea of the government being able to track the daily comings and goings of its citizens – was

380 A. Raun, Taavi Aas online-intervjuus: ID-kaardi pilet jäi ajale jalgu. – Postimees 3 January 2013, <http://arvamus.postimees.ee/1091262/taavi-aas-online-intervjuus-id-kaardi-pilet-jai-ajale-jalgu> (accessed 8 April 2015).

381 M. Tammet, K. Vasli, Paanika Facebookis: ühiskaardi abil nuhitakse, kas inimene ikka püsib haiguslehel olles kodus? Õhtuleht 19 February 2013, <http://www.oh tuleht.ee/510721> (accessed 8 April 2015).

382 M. Tammet, K. Vasli, Paanika Facebookis.

still a very unpopular concept. Most comments below the news article and shared news reports on Facebook expressed anger and discontent, comparing the current system in place with the movie “Minority Report” where everybody is recognizable everywhere. Others, although a minority expressed a scepticism at the outrage against the Public Transportation System. One individual in the comments section listed their reasons for not believing that the current system was any threat:

It is silly, because: 1. Buses are not used by all people, and the people who do use public transport are not of interest to the government. 2. The free public transport card only registers and records entrances, not exits. 3. For spying on the general population there are other technological capabilities, like mobile positioning.³⁸³

At the moment public transportation route development and improvement by utilizing the gathered commuter data to plan better infrastructure has not been realized, as city officials say it is too early just yet, but that the data will definitively be used in the future. There is an opportunity to create transparency with the data collected about commuters, if there could be some kind of display with the collected data: to visually demonstrate population movement, and what happens in a urban environment when citizens leave traces. Examples of Estonian artistic projects where similar concepts were explored included a group project that used mobile positioning. In 2006 a group of Estonian architects and scientists proposed a project entitled “JointSpace” for the Venice Architectural Biennial, which was built on mobile positioning.³⁸⁴ Organizers Ülar Mark and Rein Ahas wrote: “Mobile positioning is a convenient means for this – cell phones in the pockets of most people can be determined, analyzed and displayed. This information can be used for spatial education of people and as an input

383 M. Tammet, K. Vasli, Paanika Facebookis.

384 Joint Space: Open Source on Mobile Positioning and Urban Studies. Eds. Ü. Mark, K. Pae, R. Ahas. Tallinn: Positium, 2006.

about the democracy of participation.”³⁸⁵ The basic premise of the project was to explore how different aspects of urbanism could be studied by means of mobile positioning.

Jointspace.ee consists of a spatial database, server-side core for requesting and processing data, a web-based visualization application and data output environment. The core of the system is a server-side environment that handles all processes, data storage and management.³⁸⁶ The project “Joint Space” could be understood as an experiment in urban space, which raises several questions concerning privacy and surveillance. On the other hand it gave experimental examples of how to gather data about peoples movement in urban environments using digital devices. The researcher’s interest is to examine two different types of interaction, one of which is playful and the other applied and practical.

Projects that explore the topic of artistic experiments in private and public space are nothing new, and they are not all done digitally, as art history we can bring forth many examples of explorations of similar themes with different mediums. However, it is of course interesting to probe or experiment the digital environment with digital tools, some examples include: Face to “Facebook” (2012)³⁸⁷ by Paolo Cirio (IT) and Alessandro Ludovico (IT), “Newstweek” (2011)³⁸⁸ by Julian Oliver (NZ) and Danja Vasiliev (RU) and “A Day without a Mobile Phone” (2007) by Riin Rõõs (EE) and Eve Arpo (EE).³⁸⁹

8.8. Conclusions

Artistic positions and practices, such as the discussed privacy experiments in public and artistic spaces, allows us to question accepted solutions about public information and information

385 Joint Space.

386 Joint Space, p. 25.

387 Face to Facebook. 2012, <http://www.face-to-facebook.net> (accessed 8 April 2015).

388 Newstweek. 2011, <http://newstweek.com> (accessed 8 April 2015).

389 A Day Without The Mobile Phone, 2007, <http://youmustrelax.com/paev-ilma-mobiilita/?lang=en> (accessed 8 April 2015).

management of personal data. Digital installations like Timo Toots's "Memopol" (2010) combine interactive installation and the Estonian National ID Card, which probe ideas about our modern age of surveillance society further enabled by digital technology. The "Memopol" user goes from being merely an exhibition visitor to being part of the artwork itself, as the cryptic machine exposes a web of public and private systems of personal information aggregation. "Мемопол-II", criticizes the Estonian government's policy on citizen information storage online and the lack of public debate about privacy. Estonia's small population combined with lack of public discourse on potential problems that can arise out of a governments technophilia – has arguably led to a lowering of moral standards.³⁹⁰

National attitudes towards the topic of government surveillance, and the debate on what constitutes as an invasion of privacy, differs in countries with different social and historical background. In Estonia the recent Soviet-past (Estonia was occupied by the USSR until 1994 – when the military withdrew) and KGB history would arguably make the population more cautious and sensitive to human rights abuses. However the paradox of the situation is, that surveillance tools are more publicly accepted, available and much more persuasive part of daily life than during the Soviet KGB era. The post-soviet environment combines the fear and apathy with the former regime, with a distrust and uncertainty about the new regime – as demonstrated by the popularity of conspiracy theories concerning the long hand of the government. It is possible that the former Soviet regime, with its infamous surveillance state – merely prepared the citizens of this small Baltic nation for the next era of technological surveillance.

Increasing advances in surveillance technology in both the public and private sphere, as well as social and cultural shifts brought about by digital media have created more accepting paradigms about privacy. Entrusting our most personal information to private corporations like Google and Facebook, have not been adequately discussed as possible threats to personal privacy and data collec-

390 G. Lauringson, Tehnoloogiline radikalism ja...

tion of unsuspecting individuals. However, artistic experiment exhibited in the public sphere could be used as catalysts for change, by enabling public discourse on topics of privacy with public experiments – which in turn create a research source for the public.

This perception shift has been communicated in artworks, which is an example of how the topic has entered the public sphere. As Derrick de Kerckhove explained the phenomena in “The Skin of Culture, Investigating the New Electronic Reality” (1997), the world we live in – our environment is increasingly becoming a database for information, which in turn creates new needs for personal information management.

With the advent of computers, that has been turned around into a feeling for our organic integrity. We are not yet fully ecological, but we have become much more demanding about the management of our environment. The environment has ceased to be a neutral container for our activities. It is made of information, it is becoming “intelligent” and, via the media, everything is coming out into the open.³⁹¹

Neither public institutions or private corporations can be solely trusted when it comes to the ethical management of this new information environment, which so easily enables invasions of personal privacy by surveillance, storage and mishandling of an individuals private information. As the state is not infallible or inevitably wise, it can and will make mistakes, which can be caught and solved by artistic intervention. Making privacy issues public through artistic intervention can clarify ongoing matters, offer new solutions to problems or at the very least bring critical social topics into the public sphere.

391 D. de Kerckhove, *The Skin of Culture*.

9. Resüme

Käesoleva doktoritöö moodustavad seitse artiklit, mille uurimiseesmärk on vaadelda sotsiaalmeedia mõju ja võrrelda digitaalse identiteedi uurimisel kasutatavaid metodoloogilisi lähenemisi. Terminit „identiteet“ kasutatakse raamistava terminina, mille abil analüüsitakse sotsiaalmeedia kasutust ja tänapäevast kultuurikäitumist. Identiteediuringud keskenduvad sellele, kuidas identiteeti edasi antakse, esitatakse, tsenseeritakse ja kontekstualiseeritakse. Esimese küsimusena võib pähe tulla, miks üldse pöörata tähelepanu identiteediloomele digitaalses keskkonnas.

Teema aktuaalsus on seotud identiteedil põhinevate sotsiaalmeedia veebilehtede, nagu Facebook, Twitter, Blogger jt, järsult kasvanud populaarsuse ja kultuurimõjuga. Nimetatud veebilehti nähakse eelkõige suhtlusvahendi ja seejärel äriliselt eduka ettevõtmisena, mis muudab sotsiaalmeedias profiili loomise tehnoloogia, kultuuri ja tarbimisega seotud tegevuseks. Doktoritöös vaadeldakse seda, millist kultuurilist ja sotsiaalset mõju see avaldab, kui meie reaalsustaju ja mina põimuvad lahutamatu digitaaltehnooloogiaga.

Meediaökoloogia üks alusteooriaid ütleb, et iga tehnoloogia on olemuselt ideoloogiliselt kallutatud;³⁹² see tähendab, et kõikidel tööriistadel on ettenähtud kasutusviis. Sarnast ideed väljendatakse ka uue meedia uuringutes levinud terminiga „lubavused“ (*affordance*), mida võiks lahti seletada kui suhet toimija ja tema keskkonna vahel.³⁹³ Sotsiaalmeedia lubavused määravad, kuidas inimesed võrgus käituvad. Sotsiaalmeedia tehnoloogia suunab, kuidas me ennast esitleme ja teistega suhtleme. Kas alateadlikult või nähtavalt muudavad need tööriistad ja need loonud ettevõtted meie käitumist ja minatunnet.

Sotsiaalmeedia mõjutab ühtlasi meie arusaama ajast ja ajalisusest, sest näeme kestvat hetke kui võimalikku sotsiaalmeedia

392 N. Postman, Technopoly.

393 Identity Technologies.

sisu, mida esitada dokumenteeritud minevikuna. Sotsiaalmeedias enese jäädvustamise suurenev populaarsus võib olla oleviku järele nostalgiat tundva ülimalise eneseteadlikkuse kultuuri tulemus. Populaarsed nutitelefonile mõeldud võltsvanaaegsed fotorakendused, nagu Instagram ja Hipstamatic, pakuvad samal ajal sotsiaalmeedia sisu, teavet identiteedi kohta ja paradoksaalselt autentsust jäljendamise kaudu, muutes nutitelefoni tehtud digifoto vana paberfoto sarnaseks. Samamoodi mõjutab indiviidi, institutsiooni või ettevõtte olemasolu võrgus seda, kuidas eespool nimetatute olulisust tajutakse pärismaailmas.

Õige foto postitamine õigel ajal õige filtriga õigel sotsiaalmeedia veebilehel võib tekitada kultuurilist sidusust. Kindlasse kogukonda kuulumine sel viisil, et peetakse kinni asjaomase kogukonna kommetest ja tavadest, mida ei ole vaja sõnaselgelt välja öelda ega peale suruda, vaid mida järgitakse vabast tahtest ja ajast meelelahutuse huvides, on teatud pehme võimu vorm. Üks näide mitteverbaalse ja kirjas kehtestamata võimu ja veenmisvõime kohta on nn netikett, sest keegi ei ole meile ametlikult õpetanud, kuidas e-kirju kirjutada³⁹⁴ või sotsiaalmeedia sisu luua, ehkki oleme teadlikud, mida loetakse kummaski meediumis lubatavaks ja mida mitte. Sotsiaalsele kontrollile lisaks on sotsiaalmeedia tarkvara loodud selleks, et manipuleerida võrgus inimestevahelise suhtlusega, mis väljendub näiteks sõbrataotluste ja inimestelt väljameelitatud oleku-uuenduste näol.³⁹⁵ Need hedonistlikud sotsiaalse manipulatsiooni meetodid ei ole lihtsalt ärritavad asjaolud, vaid osa suuremast sotsiaalsest probleemistikust, mis hõlmab reeglite järgimist, tarbimist ja rahulolu.

Käesoleva artiklikogumiku läbiv teema on järgmine: identiteedi loomise suurenenud osatähtsus sotsiaalmeedias on olulisel määral mõjutanud tänapäeva tarbijaühiskonna kodanike igapäevaelu. See väide juhatab sisse doktoritöös käsitletud mõisted kolme peamise uurimisküsimuse kaudu.

1. Mis on sotsiaalmeedia uuringud?

394 C. Thurlow, L. Lengel, A. Tomic, Computer Mediated Communication.

395 Vt lisa A joonist 1 Facebooki oleku-uuenduste viipade kohta.

2. Mis on digitaalne identiteet?
3. Mida kujutab endast märkimisväärne meediamõju?

91. Mis on sotsiaalmeedia uuringud?

Minu doktoritöö jaoks tehtud uurimustes käsitletakse peamiselt sotsiaalvõrgustikku Facebook. Sotsiaalmeedia laiemas tähenduses võib olla mis tahes internetiplatvorm, mis võimaldab inimeste omavahelist suhtlust. Arvuti vahendusel toimuva suhtluse kohta on loodud hulganisti teooriaid, mis uurivad inimsuhtlust võrgus ja selle mõju üksikisikutele ja kogukondadele. Sotsiaalmeediauuringud on interdistsiplinaarne valdkond, mis ühendab muu hulgas meediauuringuid, kommunikatsiooni, narratoloogiat, infoteadusi, kultuuriuuringuid, sotsioloogiat, filosoofiat ja psühholoogiat.

Ülesande keerukus seisneb selles, kuidas seletada, välja selgitada ja tõlgendada, mil moel mõjutab meie sõltuvus tehnikast meie kultuuri, suhteid ja isegi minatunnet. Marshall McLuhan on märkinud, et „me kujundame endale tööriistad ja seejärel hakkavad need tööriistad meid vormima“. Tema idee alus on üldisem meediateooria, mis kulgeb paralleelselt semiootikas, kultuuriteoorias, filosoofias ja antropoloogias käibivate arusaamadega, et keel on piirav ega kirjelda midagi, vaid pigem ütleb meile ette, kuidas me asju mõistame ja tajume. Eeltoodust kasvab välja tehnikaga seonduv filosoofiline tuummõte, et just nii, nagu keel muudab maailma, teevad seda ka kommunikatsioonitehnoloogiavahendid, mis omakorda põhjustab tähenduse muutumist.³⁹⁶ „Toimimisvõime“ (*agency*) on termin, millega tähistatakse üksiksiku võimet mõjutada teadlikult teisi inimesi sotsiaalsete vahendite ja isikliku kogemuse kaudu. Siinkohal aitab kriitilisest teooriast lähtuv ning kaasaegsesest kunstist ja filosoofiast pärinev posthumanismi mõiste eristada inimese teistes keskkondades restruktureeritud identiteedi ja toimimisvõime tähendust.

Sotsiaalmeedia tehnoloogia mõistmine on teatud vaatenurgast

osa ajaloolisest ökoloogilisest arengust, kus inimsuhtluse viisid on alati tehnika mõjul muutunud. Viisid, kuidas inimesed praegu infot hangivad ja saavad, on eelmise põlvkonnaga võrreldes palju muutunud, sest meie suhtluskeskkond on teistsugune. Sotsioloogial põhinev sotsiaalvõrgustiku teooria tunnistab sotsiaalsete agentide vaheliste suhete ja muustrite analüüsimise olulisust grupidünaamika mõistmisel. Tugevad suhted üksikute sotsiaalsete agentide vahel tugevdavad sotsiaalvõrgustikus kogukonna ühtekuuluvustunnet. Sotsiaalmeediaplatvormide hulka kuuluvad näiteks võrgus päeviku pidamine (blogimine), Twitteris lühiblogi pidamine, piltide jagamine veebilehtedel, nagu Tumblr ja Pinterest, ning videote ja audiofailide loomine ja jagamine (videoblogid ja taskuhääling). Tekstis nimetatud kirjalikud allikad katavad ka teisi sotsiaalmeedia vorme, mis on kommunikatsiooniajaloo välitel eksisteerinud.

Sotsiaalvõrgustikele lisaks leidub internetis suur hulk teist laadi sotsiaalmeediakanaleid ning neid oli olemas juba enne interneti, raalinduse algpäevil. Massachusetts Institute of Technology algatuse „Tehnoloogia ja mina“ looja ja juhataja Sherry Turkle on psühhoanalüütilisest vaatenurgast uurinud identiteedimängu MUD-ides (*multi-user dungeons*, mitme mängijaga internetimängud), mida mängiti interneti varases eelkäijas ARPANETis 1970. aastate keskel.³⁹⁷ Ta jälgis võrgusuhtlust ja vestles osalejatega väljaspool võrgukeskkonda nii eraviisiliselt kui ka rühmaintervuude käigus ning leidis, et fantaasial põhinevates võrgukeskkondades on rollimängudel ja eri isiksuste kehastamisel inimeste jaoks teraapiline mõju. Turkle'i värskemad uurimused käsitlevad intiimsuse uusi tähendusi ja püüavad suurendada teadlikkust sellest, kuidas mõjutab inimsuhteid kõikjal levinud digitaalkultuur. „Peame tehnikat piisavalt armastama, et seda täpselt kirjeldada. Peame ka ennast piisavalt armastama, et teadvustada, millist mõju tehnika meile tegelikult avaldab.“³⁹⁸ Lugusid, mida inimesed enda kohta võrgus vestavad, aktsepteeritakse, et aidata neil inimestel end ja oma keskkonda mõista.³⁹⁹ 21. sajandil jaga-

397 S. Turkle, *Life on the Screen*.

398 S. Turkle, *Alone Together*, lk 243.

399 R. Page, *Stories and Social Media*.

me identiteeti puudutavaid narratiive suuremal määral kui eales varem just sotsiaalmeediaplatvormides, kuid selleks, et kõneleda tehnika mõjust identiteedinarratiividele, peame kõigepealt mõistma, kui keeruline on tegelikult inimese identiteet.

Sotsiaalmeedia ja identiteedi analüüsimiseks viidatakse kultuuriuuringutes sageli Judith Butleri performatiivsuse teooriale ja Erving Goffmani esinemisteooriale (*performance theory*). Goffman käis välja mõtte, et sotsiaalne identiteet on nagu esimine, Butler väitis, et sotsiaalne sugu ei ole kaasasündinud, vaid seda konstrueeritakse performatiivselt. „Subjekti sise- ja välismaailma jagunemise teel seatakse piirid, mida sotsiaalse regulatsiooni ja kontrolli huvides rangelt jälgitakse.”⁴⁰⁰ Mõlema vaatenurga puhul võetakse arvesse identiteedi elluviimise aluseks olevaid kultuurilisi konstrukte ja sotsiaalset survet ning inimeste vajadust sotsiaalse kaasatuse järele. Sotsiaalmeedia uurimustes võidakse kasutada ka empiirilisi meetodeid, näiteks intervjuud, statistikat ja enesehinnangulisi andmeid, kuid nii võivad jääda piisava tähelepanuta keerulised sotsiaalsed suhted mina, enese-esitluse, teiste ja võimustruktuuride vahel.

Meediateoorias kehtivad teatud eeldused, mis määravad, kuidas tuleb kriitiliselt analüüsida inimese suhet kommunikatsioonitehnoloogiaga. Esimene eeldus on, et tehnoloogia juhib meie käitumist, mis on tehnikafilosoofiast, meediaökoloogiast ja lubavusteooriast tuttav tehnoloogilise determinismi teooria. Teine vaatenurk jälle eitab, et tehnoloogial oleks mingid sisemised omadused, mis meid kuidagi mõjutaksid.⁴⁰¹ Näiteks etnograafiliste lähenemisviiside puhul keskendutakse eri võimalustele, kuidas saab näha inimese ja tehnoloogia suhteid, ning pannakse rõhku individuaalsetele eeldustele, hoiakutele, tajudele ja kogemustele.⁴⁰² Virtuaalne ja visuaalne etnograafia⁴⁰³ annavad juhised kirjeldamiseks seda, kuidas võrgukeskkonnas osalejad identiteedi edastamist ja tõlgendamist kogevad. Etnograafiline lähenemisviis sisaldab kvalitatiivset uurimismeetodit, mis annab edasi

400 J. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, lk 133.

401 K. Grint, D. Woolgar, *The Machine at Work*.

402 C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*.

403 S. Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography*.

interaktsiooni vahendatud vormide keerukuse, kogemused ja tajud virtuaalses keskkonnas, mida saab seejärel analüüsida, et jõuda selgusele, kuidas väikesed inimrühmad igapäevaelus tähendust tõlgendavad.⁴⁰⁴

Näite selle kohta, kuidas virtuaalse etnograafia refleksiivset kvalitatiivset lähenemisviisi kasutatakse Facebooki kasutajate meediumialaste tajude ja kogemuste mõistmiseks, leiab artiklist pealkirjaga „Kunstnik ja digitaalkultuur: Sotsiaalmeedias enese reklaamimise raskused” („Artists and Digital Culture: (the strain of) Self-Promotion in Social Media”, 7. peatükk). Uurimust esitleti Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association'i konverentsil jaotuses „Virtuaalne identiteet ja enesereklaam” paneelis pealkirjaga „Kutsealase identiteedi väljendamine võrgukeskkonnas”. Hiljem avaldati see ajakirjas Journal of Media Transformations (10. kd). Artiklis uuritakse paradigmaatilist kultuurinihet reaalse ja virtuaalse maailma tajutud tähenduses ning seda, kuidas on ümber pööratud arusaam sellest, mis on relevantne ja mis enam mitte. Artikkel tugines Eesti Kunstiakadeemia ning Eesti Muusika- ja Teatriakadeemiaga seotud kunstnike ja loovisikutega tehtud intervjuudele. Kunstnikele kinnitati, et nad jäävad anonüümseks, ja neilt küsiti intervjuu käigus enese-esitluse ja meediumi kasulikkuse või kasutuse kohta, samuti uuriti, kuidas nad tõlgendavad seda, mil moel teised inimesed end Facebookis kuvavad. Nende intervjuude käigus küsiti selle kohta, kuidas kunstnikud Facebookis ametialast identiteeti kujundavad või paljastavad ja kui keeruline on identiteedi väljendamine sotsiaalvõrgustikes.

Kasutajad väljendasid ebamugavust selle üle, kui nende Facebooki sõbrad jagavad liiga palju isiklikku infot, mis neile huvi ei paku. Samuti kirjeldasid nad ebamugavus- või usaldamatusetunnet juhul, kui sõbrad ei jaga piisavalt isiklikku teavet. Sotsiaalvõrgustiku kasutajad süüdistasid teisi poseerimises, et nood püüdsid välja näha õnnelikumad, edukamad, tähtsamad ja sotsiaalselt paremate sidemetega, kui nad on tegelikus elus (väljaspool võrgumaailma). Küsitluses osalenud sotsiaalvõrgustiku

kasutajad lisasid, et peavad lugema ridade vahelt ehk ühe vastaja sõnul „mängima detektiivi”,⁴⁰⁵ et saada rohkem teada, kes profiili taga peituv inimene tegelikult on, uurides selleks nende sõbrasi-demeid, meeldivusi, kogukondlikke kuuluvusi ja muud taolist.

Intervjuude läbivateks teemadeks olid autentsus ja rühma relevantsus, enesereklaam ja enesetsensuur ning professionaal-se identiteedi kujundamine. Intervjuude aluseks olid sotsiaal-meediaplatvormiga seotud hoiakud ja kogemused kindla grupi kontekstis (akadeemiatega seotud loovisikud) ning need põhine-sid meediaökoloogia teorial. Selle taustaks oli püüd ühendada pealtnäha vastandlikud lubavusteooria ja tehnoloogiline deter-minism ehk idee, et tööriistad eeldavad teatud kasutusviisi, ja et-nograafiline arusaam, et tööriistadel puudub olemuslik tähendus ja et alles nende teatud viisil kasutamine annab neile tähenduse.

Sotsiotehniliste süsteemide uurimisel kerkib teele palju takis-tusi, sealhulgas uurija ja toimijate asetused, sest sotsiaalmeediaplat-vormid on dünaamilised keskkonnad. Mis täna veel olemas oli, ei pruugi seda homme enam olla ja kindla sotsiaalmeediažanri laiaulatuslik populaarsus võib kaduda täieliku unustuse hõl-ma väga lühikese aja jooksul. Varasemad veebiuurijad püüdsid võrguarfakte dokumenteerida ja teoretiseerida uue meediumi kunstilise väärtuse üle.⁴⁰⁶ Selline meediumipõhine dokumentee-rimine kaotab kiiresti oma kultuurilise asjakohasuse ja muutub lõpuks meediaarheoloogiaks, viidates URL-idele, mis enam ei tööta, ning profiilidele ja lehekülgedele, mis on ammu unustatud. Facebooki kasutajaliidest uuendatakse pidevalt ette hoiatamata ja võimaluseta täiustusest loobuda. Lisas A on toodud Facebooki kasutajaliidese kuvatõmmised, et näitlikustada kasutaja lubavuste väljameelitamist veebilehe kasutajaliidese ja kujunduse kau-du. Liides on möödunud aastast saadik, kui tõmmised tehti, juba muutunud. Samal ajal nõutakse sotsiaaltööstuse uurimustelt, et need arvestaksid nii tehnilisi kui ka sotsiaalseid tahke. Noo-rema põlvkonna veebiuurijad on teadlikud, et see, millele nad avaldamise ajal viitavad, ei pruugi lähitulevikus enam alles olla.

405 Vt lisast C kunstnike ja sotsiaalmeedia uuringu intervjuu protokollinäidet.

406 R. Page, *Stories and Social Media*.

Uurijate töö teeb raskeks selle nähtuse pidev muundumine, mille tõttu on inimeste suhtlustavade mõistmine veelgi suurem vaev. Seepärast kirjeldavadki sotsiaalmeedia uurijad sageli, keda nad uurivad, aga mitte seda, millist tehnoloogiat sel ajal parajasti kasutati.

Termini „sotsiaalvõrgusait“ (*social networking site*) määratles Danah Boyd 2007. aastal ja seda uuendati 2013. aastal, et kajastada paremini praegust meediamaaistikku. Ellison ja Boyd defineerisid sotsiaalvõrgusaiti kui võrgustikulaadset suhtlusplatvormi, mis annab internetikasutajale liidese kujundusest tulevad lubavused, et ta saaks luua kordumatu profiili (identiteedi), määratleda ennast teistega võrreldes (grupiidentiteet või võrgustikku kuuluvus) ning luua ja jagada sisu.⁴⁰⁷ Selleks et kiiresti muutuva keskkonnaga sammu pidada, peavad digikultuuri uurijad tingimata kõik määratlused ja terminid ajakohased hoidma.

9.2. Mis on digitaalne identiteet?

Terminil „digitaalne identiteet“ võib lähenemisviisist olenevalt olla eri konnotatsioone ja definitsioone. Näiteks teabehalduse ja ettevõtluse vaatenurgast kasutatakse digitaalset identiteeti, kui räägitakse identiteedijuhtimise struktuurist. Teabejuhtide ja infotehnoloogide jaoks hõlmab digitaalne identiteet identiteedijuhtimise strateegiaid, identiteediandmete loendeid, andmestrukture, autoriseerimist, usaldusväärsust ja privaatsust.⁴⁰⁸ Selles artiklikogumikus vaadeldakse digitaalset identiteeti kultuuri seisukohalt, pannes rohkem rõhku meediateooriale, filosoofiale ja kultuurikriitikale. Identiteedijuhtimise struktuur puudutab tagasüsteemi (*back end*), see tähendab ettevõtteid, mis käitavad veebilehti, kus salvestatakse inimeste kohta teavet, mõnel juhul ka nende nõusoleku või sõnaõiguseta. Minu uurimused puudutavad eessüsteemi (*front end*) – mitte ärilist ega tehnilise arenduse poolt, vaid lõppkasutajaid –, et kaaluda võrgus digitaalse

407 N. Ellison, d. boyd, *Sociality through Social Network Sites*.

408 P. J. Windley, *Digital Identity*.

identiteedi sihiliku loomise üha suuremat kultuurilist osatähtsust ning seda, kuidas see mõjutab kasutaja mina-tunnet ja keskkonda.

Michel Foucault pakkus välja enesetehnoloogiate mõiste, mis kirjeldab seda, kuidas üksikisik konstrueerib identiteete enda kohta lugusid rääkides. Need tehnoloogiad, mis võimaldavad inimestel (tehniliste lubavuste kaudu) identiteete luua, alluvad sotsiaalsele ja psühholoogilisele survele. Nii võrgus kui ka väljaspool seda suunavad identiteedi konstrueerimist kontekst, suhestumine teiste inimestega ja sotsiaalsed olukorrad. Sellist identiteedi konstrueerimise sotsiaalset, kultuurilist või tehnilist protsessi võiks võtta ka kui teatavat liiki vahendust, kus suhtlusega ei anta infot mitte ainult edasi, vaid seda ka filtreeritakse tugevalt. Võrgus toimuvate identiteedimängude olemus seisneb selles, et meedium on anonüümne ja et kehatu kasutaja peab looma identiteedialase teabe võrgus vahendatud kujul.

Siinkohal on oluline pidada meeles just kehatust, sest see peegeldab tõsiasja, kuidas internetikasutajad on visuaalsete ja paralingvistiliste vahendite puudusel oma füüsilisest kehast võrgus potentsiaalselt vabastatud. Tehnoloogia vahendusel toimivas sotsiaalses suhtluses saab füüsilisi näitajaid, nagu rassi, sugu, vanust ja muud visuaalset teavet, ähmastada. Vahendatud suhtluses ei ole enam nii selged ka kõne ja kuulmisega seotud tegurid, nagu keel, aktsent ja hääletoon, ning mitteverbaalsed märgid, nagu žestid, näoilmed ja emotsioonid. Identiteeti määravad tegurid, nagu sotsiaalne klass, ühiskondlik positsioon, amet, vanus ja sugu, annavad vihjeid, mille abil suunatakse sotsiaalset interaktsiooni⁴⁰⁹, kuid digikeskkonnas ei ole neist nii palju abi.

Tänapäevased postmodernistlikud identiteediuurijad vaatavad identiteeti kui kulgevat protsessi, mitte kui midagi fikseeritud. Identiteedi esitlemine sotsiaalmeedia platvormides ei ole samuti ühekordne sündmus, vaid toimub pidevalt ühe postituse ja oleku-uuenduse kaupa. Võrgus enese esitlemine on teatud laadi kuvandi juhtimine, mis iseenesest ei ole sugugi uus idee – juba Erving Goffman pakkus välja, et inimesed veedavad terve elu teistest teatud kuvandeid luues ja püüdes mõjutada või

409 C. Thurlow, L. Lengel, A. Tomic, Computer Mediated Communication.

manipuleerida enda kuvandit teiste silmis.⁴¹⁰ Goffmani tööle on viidatud kui mikrosotsioloogiale, sest ta pani rõhku sotsiaalse interaktsiooni väikseimatele detailidele, näiteks sellele, kuidas muutub inimese näoilme, kui ta arvab, et keegi teda vaatab, võrreldes sellega, kui keegi teda ei jälgi, ja kuidas muutub meie ilme, kui on oodata sotsiaalset suhtlust.

Ehkki mitme identiteedi olemasolu võib kõlada kui mingit liiki vaimne häire, on identiteediuurijate seas tegelikult üks põhieeldusi just see, et identiteet ei ole ühene, vaid et inimene esitleb end kontekstist sõltuvalt eri moodsu kogu elu jooksul. Näiteks esineb inimene ühe persoonina abikaasaga suheldes ja teise persoonina võõraga vesteldes või käitub oma lapsega ühtmoodsu ja ülemusesga teistmoodsu. Sotsiaalseid suhteid kannavad sotsiaalsed identiteetid, mis kujunevad tajutavate jõustruktuuride, suhete, konteksti- ja rühma sidususvajaduse põhjal.

Digitaalsed identiteetid moodustavad sotsiaalmeedia sisu, just nagu telesaated moodustavad televisiooni sisu ja heli on raadioülekande sisu. Sotsiaalmeedia sisu eristab varasemast, traditsioonilise elektroonilise meedia sisuloomest see, kes on sisu looja. Tim O'Reilly tegi 2004. aastal populaarseks sõnaühendi „Web 2.0“, mis osutab kasutajate loodud internetisisule. Kasutaja loodud sisu on oluline areng võrreldes selle kommunikatsioonitehnoloogia etapiga, kus meediahegemoonia oli peamine kõneaine selle tõttu, et meediamaaistikul oli monopol käputäie ettevõtete käes, kellel oli seetõttu sisuloojatena ka tugev jõupositsioon. Võimu nihkumine rahvusvahelise konglomeraadi käest rohujuure tasandil sisuloojate kätte toob kaasa omad sotsiaalsed pinged ja eetilised probleemid, sest tootjal ja tootel on üha raskem vahet teha. Digitaalse identiteedi puhul muudab määratletud, kaubaks tehtud mina identiteediteabe ja isikuandmed müüdavaks tooteks ja minast saab ressurss.

SIDE-mudeli (*social identity model of deindividuation effects*, deindividuaatsiooni mõjude sotsiaalse identiteedi mudel) kohaselt surub digitaalne kultuurikeskkond peale suurema rühmasidususe (sotsiaalse identiteedi) kui võrguväline interaktsioon. See tähendab,

410 E. Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*.

et meedium vormib ümber nii indiviide kui ka kogukondasid. Kultuuriuurijad on sellele nähtusele viidanud kui „võrgustatud avalikkus“, mida Danah Boyd määratleb kui „avalikkust, mille on ümberstruktureerinud võrgutehnoloogia.“⁴¹¹ Kui näiteks Facebooki kasutaja esitleb end võrgus sellisel moel, mis ei peegelda otseselt tema isikut väljaspool võrku, näemegi, kuidas sotsiaalmeediavõrgustik on inimese identiteedi väljendumist restruktureerinud. Ühtlasi saame paremini aimu sellest, kuidas sotsiaalmeediavõrgustikud on tekitanud kultuurilisi transformatsioone, mis restruktureerivad meie eraelulisi ja tööalaseid suhteid ning meie minatunnet. Enesetsensuuri ja -reklaami aspekte võrgustatud avalikkuses on käsitletud osades „Sotsiaalvõrgustike etnograafia: Virtuaalne etnograafia ja digitaalne identiteet“ („Ethnographies of Social Networks: Virtual Ethnography and Digital Identity“, 6. peatükk) ja „Kunstnik ja digitaalkultuur: Sotsiaalmeedias enese reklaamimise raskused“ („Artists and Digital Culture: (the strain of) Self-Promotion in Social Media“, 7. peatükk).

Võrgueksistentsi iseloomustab üldtunnustatud privaatsuse ja avalikkuse paradoks, sest internetikasutajad ühtaegu uhkeldavad enda kohta käivate andmetega ja varjavad neid oma võrgu-mina loomisel. Informatiivne enesemääratlemine on digitaalses võrgukeskkonnas lihtsam kui materiaalses pärismaailmas, sest enese kohta käiv võrguteave koosneb tekstist, piltidest, videotest ja muust taolisest. Teise soo, rassi, vanuse või vaadete usutav kujutamine on päriselus keerulisem, sest visuaalsed märgid ja kontekstiline teave edastavad infot juba enne, kui inimene suu avab. Digitaalsete identiteetide loomine ning samaaegse privaatsussoovi ja avaliku tähelepanu iha paradoks moodustavad laiaulatuslike sotsiaalsete ja kultuuriliste suundade seas kõigest ühe mikrokosmose. Teabeajastu privaatsus on teema selle doktoritöö kahes artiklis: „Digitaalne identiteet: Avalikkuse ja privaatsuse paradoks“ („Digital Identity: Exploring the Public Private Paradox“, 4. peatükk) ja „Privaatsuseksperimendid avalikus ja kunstilises ruumis“ („Privacy Experiments in Public and Artistic Spaces“,

411 d. boyd, Social Network Sites as Networked Publics, lk 39–58.

8. peatükk). Niinimetatud jälgimis- või läbipaistvusühiskonnas⁴¹² on paljud demokraatlike riikide kodanikud kogenud märkimisväärselt nihet selles, kui kergesti võib inimestelt võtta nende õiguse privaatsusele; vuajerism ei ole ainult läbiv teema meelelahutusmaailmas, vaid infoajastu aktsepteeritud sotsiaalne tava. Privaatsus, andmete õngitsemine ja väljameelitavad lubavused on digiajastu eetikaküsimused, sest praeguseks on ärilised huvid ja igapäevane inimsuhtlus väga tihedalt läbi põimunud.

Teine filosoofiline küsimus, mis tõusetub digitaalsest identiteedist rääkides, on sotsiaalmeedia tehnoloogias peituv sisemine nartsissism. Artikkel „Digitaallaineil: Digitaalne identiteet kui ekstensioon“ („Surfing the Digital Wave: Digital Identity as Extension“, 5. peatükk) käsitleb McLuhani ekstensiooniteooriaid ja selgitab, kuidas inimesed valdavalt tehnilisele keskkonnale reageerivad. 1964. aastal avaldatud raamatus „Kuidas mõista meediat“ („Understanding Media“) tõi McLuhan välja oma ekstensiooniteooriate põhijooned peatükis „Vidinaarmastus: Narkissos kui narkoos“ („The Gadget Love: Narcissus as Narcosis“). Kreeka mütoloogias ei tundnud nooruk Narkissos ära omaenda peegelpilti vees ja hukkus, sest ei suutnud end sellest kuidagi lahti rebida. Müüdi varasemates versioonides ei saanud noormees näha oma peegeldust ühelgi teisel moel kui vees ja sooritas seetõttu enesetapu.

McLuhan tõlgendab Narkissose kohta käivat müüti selle nurga alt, et Narkissos ei olnud armunud iseendasse, vaid oma kuvandi ekstensiooni, tõmbus seetõttu enesesse ja keskendus ainult oma laiendatud kujutisele.⁴¹³ Meediakunstis on kordi ja kordi käsitletud ideed, kuidas inimest lummas ja vangistab tema enda kujutis mõnes teises meediumis. Nam June Paiki tuntuim kunstiteos „TV Buddha“ (1974) kujutas pronksist Buddha-kujust, futuristlikust ümarast teleekraanist ja videokaamerast koosnevat otsepildiga videoinstallatsiooni. Buddha jälgib teleekraani, kust talle kuvatakse videokaamera abil lõpmatu jadana tema enda kujutist. Just nagu Narkissose puhul, on Buddha kinnisideeks saanud ta enda kujutis.

412 D. Brin, *The Transparent Society*.

413 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

Just nagu sotsiaalmeediakasutaja, jälgib ta ennast kui meediasisu ekraanilt ja sulgeb enda ümbritsevate materiaalse maailmale.

Tele-Buddha lahutas end ülejäänud maailmast ja toimis oma enese megalomaania või enesejälgimise servomehhanismina, jäädes igaveseks kinni peeglimaailma. „Peeglifaas“ on Jacques Lacani mõiste, mis kirjeldab arengustaadiumi, kus veel rääkimis- oskuseta laps (6–18 kuu vanune) tunneb ära enda peegelpildi. Lacani järgi on ainult inimestele omane olla oma kujutisest nõnda sissevõetud, sest loomal kaob lõpuks huvi ära, aga inimesel mitte kunagi.⁴¹⁴ See seletab, miks on nõnda populaarne igasugune sotsiaalmeedia, kus me saame luua ja uuendada omaenese kujutist ekraanil – see populaarsus on tunnistuseks meie enda tagasipeegeldatud kujutise lummusest.

9.3. Mida kujutab endast märkimisväärne meediamõju?

Digitaalsele meediale üleminekul toimus kultuuriline nihe, millega seoses vahetati kehaline eksistents pärismaailmas välja virtuaalse eksistentsi vastu. Tehnoloogiliselt deterministlikus kultuuris sõltume võrguvälise teabe kontrollimisel ja kinnitamisel üha enam digitaalsest meediast, mille tõttu on praeguses paradigmas võrguvälise (ehk päris) oma tähtsuse kaotanud ja võrgus leiduv (virtuaalne) olulisemaks muutunud. Praktiline näide tegeliku või materiaalse (võrguvälise) tähenduseta muutmiseks on see, kui Vikipeediast leitud teavet usaldatakse rohkem kui raamatus sisalduvat või kui Google'i otsingutulemused tunduvad usaldusväärsemad kui miski, mida ema on öelnud.

„Iganemine“ (*obsolescence*) on meediaökoloogias oluline termin.⁴¹⁵ Kui muidu tähistab see millegi lõppu, siis meediaökoloogias viitab see vastupidi lihtsalt uuele etapile, teatavale algusele.⁴¹⁶ Kui uue tehnoloogia või nähtuse uudsus on kadunud, see on

414 D. Evans, From Lacan to Darwin.

415 E. McLuhan, P. Zhang, Pivotal Terms in Media Ecology.

416 M. McLuhan, E. McLuhan, Laws of Media.

laialdaselt kasutusele võetud ja aktsepteeritud, hakkab tekkima küllastumine ehk nagu McLuhan on öelnud: „Iganemine saab alguse üleküllastumisest.”⁴¹⁷ Võrguvälise tähtsuse iganemine leiab aset samal ajal, kui kultuuris on hakatud hindama tegelikku, autentset, kohalikku päritolu, vanaaegsust ja samas ka enese jäädvustamist sotsiaalmeedias kui tõendust sellest, et inimene on midagi pärismaailmas ära teinud.

Neil Postman on selgitanud, kuidas tehnoloogiline muutus on ökoloogiline, mitte lisav, see tähendab, et see ei lisa midagi uut, vaid pigem muudab olemasolevat.⁴¹⁸ Postman väidab, et tehnoloogilisi mõjusid ei saa lahutada sotsiaal- ja kultuurisfäärast, kuna need on nii tihedalt läbi põimunud. Ta näitlikustab: kui me lisame tilga punast värvi klaasile veele, kas siis vesi ja värv jäävad eraldi, kas me saame punase värvitilga, mis heljub muidu selges vees? Või kas värvaine seguneb veega ja tulemuseks on hoopis midagi uut? Seega, ka tehnoloogiline muutus, näiteks uue tehnoloogia või vahendatud kommunikatsioonimeetodi väljatoomine, muudab ümbritseva maailma millekski täiesti teiseks. Selline tajum muutus mõjutab digitaalkultuuri diskursuse hermeneutilisi sihte ehk seda, kuidas lugeda, analüüsida ja tõlgendada keskkonda ja selles toimijaid.

Meediaökoloogid on püüdnud algatada ulatuslikumat arutelu selle üle, kuidas tehnika on meie igapäevaellu tunginud ja meid mõjutama hakanud, sealhulgas muutnud meie maailmanägemust, inimestevahelist suhtlust ja enesemääratlust teatud konstruktsioonide raames. Tehnilise ja kultuurilise transformatsiooni kommunikatsioonikanalites kaardistasid esimestena Walter Ong, Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman, Robert K. Logan ja Paul Levinson, kes olid suuremalt jaolt seotud meediateooria Toronto koolkonnaga. McLuhani tööd jätkas Robert K. Logan, kes kirjutas teose „Tähestiku mõju: Foneetilise tähestiku mõju Lääne tsivilisatsiooni arengule” („The Alphabet Effect: The Impact of the Phonetic Alphabet on the Development of Western Civilization”),⁴¹⁹ milles ta analüüsis tähestiku ajaloolist ja kultuurilist

417 M. McLuhan, D. Carson, *The Book of Probes*.

418 N. Postman, *Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change*.

419 R. K. Logan, *The Alphabet Effect*.

mõju planeedi eri piirkondades ja alfabeetilise kirjaoskuse teooriat. Tähestiku mõju teooria seisneb selles, et üleminek kirjaoskamatu kirjaoskajale rahvale muutis ümbritsevat maailma. See ei tähendanud kõigest üleminekut suuliselt kultuurilt kirjalikule, vaid ka abstraktse mõtlemise (teabe kodeerimine ja dekodeerimine), loogika, seadusekoodeksite, objektiivse ajaloo, individualismi ja monoteismi esiletõusu.

Praegu on kõne all tagasimine kirjaoskajalt kultuurilt suulisele kultuurile, sest uued kommunikatsioonitrendid, nagu digitaalsed narratiivid⁴²⁰ ja suulis-kirjalik⁴²¹ suhtlus, on muutnud lingvistilisi struktuure⁴²² ja loonud uusi suhtluse vorme.⁴²³ Paljudes arvuti teel toimuvates kommunikatsioonivormides on arvutikasutaja kehatu ja samuti puudub materiaalses tähenduses teave; selle asemel konstrueeritakse tähendust ja esitatakse identiteedialast teavet virtuaalkeskonna kontekstis. Pärismaailmast erinevalt ei saa arvuti teel toimivas suhtluses paljudel juhtudel toetuda multimodaalsele kommunikatsioonile ehk visuaalsetele märkidele, hääletoonile, kõnenüanssidele, kohesele visuaalsele tagasisidele ja muule kontekstuaalsele infole.

Võrgusuhtluses tekkinud tõrked võivadki olla põhjustatud puuduvast nägemis- ja kuulmissisendist, sest visuaalse ja verbaalse tagasisideta on eri nüansside tajumine tunduvalt raskem.⁴²⁴ Üks uusi tekstis emotsionaalsete varjundite ja tähenduse edastamise meetodeid, mida võib tõlgendada kui püüdu kõneldud, kuulnud ja nähtud info puudulikkust kompenseerida, on emotikon (tundeid väljendav piltmärk), näiteks naerunägu. Ehkki näiteks identiteedinarratiivid ja lugude jutustamine on alati olnud kultuuri osa, mõjutab seda, kuidas infot edasi antakse, suurel määral teabe edastamise kanal. Digitaalses keskkonnas organiseeritakse aega ja ruumi,⁴²⁵ identiteedi edastamist ja lingvistilist kohanemist teisiti

420 R. Page, *New Perspectives on Narrative and Multimodality*.

421 R. Page, *Interactivity and Interaction*.

422 J. Androutsopoulos, *Introduction: Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication*.

423 J. Androutsopoulos, *Introduction: Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication*.

424 d. boyd, M. Chang, E. Goodman, *Representations of Digital Identity*.

425 C. Hine, *Virtual Ethnography*.

ja seetõttu on muutunud ka kirjalik suhtlus – on esile kerkinud suulis-kirjalik tekstiloome ja emotikonid.

Massikommunikatsiooni ajaloos ei ole täheldatud ainult tehnika mõju suhtlusviiside muutumisele, vaid kommunikatsioonikanaleid on vaadatud ka kui märkimisväärsete kultuuriliste ja sotsiaalsete muutuste katalüsaatorit. Üks olulisemaid verstaposte tehnika- ja kommunikatsiooniajaloos on Gutenbergi trükimasina leiutamine, mis pani alguse uuele ajastule, kus vahemaad lühenevad, maailm muutus väiksemaks ja massimeedia haaras võimu.⁴²⁶ Alanud protsessi tõukasid järgnenud aastatel tagant telegraafi, raadio, televisiooni ja interneti leiutamine. Kui meile on tutvustatud uut tehnoloogiat ja see saab osaks meie igapäevaelust, mõttemallidest, suhtlusviisidest ja eksistentsist, ei ole seda enam kuidagi võimalik eemaldada, sest see on saanud meie sünnipäraseks õiguseks ja traditsiooniks.⁴²⁷

Selline äsja turule tulnud kommunikatsioonitehnoloogia viivitamata ja kõhklemata omaksvõtt on tehnoloogiliselt deterministliku kultuuri kõrvalnähe, sest me võrdsustame teadust ja tehnikat arengu ja edusammudega, mitte lihtsalt järjekordse tarbeasjaga. Seega loetakse seda normist või peavoolu diskursusest kõrvalekaldumiseks, kui keegi võtab heaks kriitiliselt analüüsida ja arutada suhtlus-, töö- ja meelelahutusvahendeid, mida me iga päev või mõnel juhul lausa iga tund kasutame. Meedia mõju kahtluse alla seadmine võib juba tunduda mässulise, eripärase või banaalsena; seda võidakse isegi näha tehnofobia või uusludiitlusena.⁴²⁸ Tegelikult aitaks meie ja tehnika suhte kriitiline analüüs tasakaalustada kultuuri, mis paneb liiga suurt rõhku elektroonikavidinatele ja progressilubaduste taha peitunud ärihuvidele. Avalikus omandis uudistekanalid tutvustavad Apple'i uusi tooteid ning neil on oma leht nii Facebookis kui ka Twitteris (mis on mõlemad eraettevõtted), mis ähmastab piire eraettevõtluse ja objektiivsuse poole püüdleva avaliku teabekanaliga vahel veelgi.

426 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

427 N. Postman, *Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change*.

428 S. Turkle, *Alone Together*.

Sotsiaalmeedia veebilehed, nagu Facebook ja Twitter, julgustavad kasutajaid spontaanselt ja end tagasi hoidmata enda kohta infot jagama, et tabada varjatud hetki inimeste igapäevaelust. Facebook ärgitab kasutajaid sageli postitusi lisama lausetega, nagu „Millest mõtled, (kasutaja nimi)?“⁴²⁹ Walter Ong on näidanud, kuidas rääkimise-kuulamise kultuurist kirjaoskajate kultuurile üle minnes muutus inimeste suhtlusviis. Walter Benjamin on aga uurinud, kuidas pildistamine ei jäädvusta hetke, vaid muudab lausa hetke olemust.⁴³⁰ Mõlemad toodud näited – suulise kirjapanek ja elava hetke püüdmine fotole – ei ole kõigest jäädvustamistoiminguid, vaid ka transformatsioon.⁴³¹

9.4. Järeldused

Selle kohta, milles seisneb sotsiaalmeedia ajastul identiteet, on eri rühmades palju lahknevaid arvamusi. Sotsiaalvõrgustike veebilehti arendavatel ettevõtetel, neid kasutavatel inimestel ja nähtust uurivatel teadlastel võivad olla üsna erinevad arusaamad selle kohta, mis toimub sotsiaalmeediavõrgustikes. Kõigi kolme rühma tegevust suunavad loomulikult eri motivaatorid – ettevõtted peavad silmas rahalist kasu, kasutajad taotlevad sotsiaalset ja kultuurilist sidusust ning uurijad püüavad teada saada ja mõista või vähemalt osaleda akadeemilises diskursuses.

Facebook on kümme aastat tagasi asutatud ettevõtte, mis 2013. aastal oli hinnanguliselt väärt 15,7 miljardit USA dollarit ja mis teenib suurema osa rahast, müües kasutajate isikuandmeid kindlale sihtgrupile reklaami tegemise jaoks. Kasutajatelt kogutakse isikuandmeid, nõudes neilt veebilehel konto loomiseks teatud info sisestamist ja hiljem paludes või meelitades neilt välja üha enam enda kohta käivat teavet. Kasutajal palutakse määrata oma asukoht, et saada teada, kus ta käib, lisada sõpru, et näha, keda ta tunneb, ja avaldada, milliseid filme ta on näinud või millistel

429 Vt lisa B joonist 2.

430 W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*.

431 d. boyd, *Social Network Sites as Networked Publics*, lk 39–58.

üritustel osalenud. Ettevõtte jätab nende lubavustega mulje, et info sisestamine on kasutaja enda huvides, eesmärgiga Facebookist viimast võtta. Isikuandmed kogutakse kokku ja müüakse edasi reklaamitegijatele, kes kasutavad profiilis leiduvat infot kuulutuste kohandamiseks ja kindlale sihtgrupile näitamiseks. See ärimudel seletab, miks sotsiaalvõrgustike ülesehitus on kujunenud just selliseks, nagu see on – aina enam identiteediga seonduvale teabele keskendunud. Selliseid üksikasjalikke andmeid koguvad portaaliid erinevad varasematest rollimängudest ja mitme mängijaga arvutimängude, jututubade ja meililistide anonüümsusest selle poolest, et viimati mainituis ei korjatud teavet veel kokku reklaamitulu huvides.

Loomulikult kerkib mitu eetilist murekohta, kui ettevõtted hakkavad dikteerima, kuidas identiteet, suhted, kogukonnad ja suhtlus välja peavad nägema. Facebooki rajaja Mark Zuckerberg on öelnud, et peab enam kui ühe identiteedi olemasolu ebaetiliseks, ebaautentseks, võltsiks.⁴³² Selles mõttes on Zuckerbergi loodul teisigi rolle peale uute suhtlusviiside võimaldamise – nimelt eksperimenteerib see veel sotsiaalse manipulatsiooni ja iroonilisel kombel ka eetikaga. Zuckerbergi rüütellik hoiak inimeste eraelu puutumatus kaitsmise suhtes ja täielik inimkonna sotsiaalse süsteemi eiramine on kujundanud ümber kogu inimsuhtluse ja selle, millist teavet me suheldes enda kohta avalikustame. Facebookis kasutatava hällist-hauani identiteedi-jäädvustamise ohtusid on palju kritiseeritud. Kriitikanooled suunavad aga alati kursilt kõrvale uudsus, meelelahutuslikkus ja viidatav edumeelsus, mida enamasti uue tehnoloogiaga seostatakse. Jaron Lanier võttis lukustatud identiteedi vastu sõna 2010. aastal avaldatud teoses „You are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto” („Sa ei ole tehnikavidin: Manifest”).

Esimesed veebilehed säilitasid 1990. aastatel inimeste omapära. MySpace'is oli seda unikaalsust veel veidi alles, kuigi kõigi ühe malli järgi vormimine oli juba alanud. Facebook läks juba sammuvõrra kaugemale, andes inimestele valikvastuste abil

432 D. Kirkpatrick, The Facebook Effect.

piiratud identiteedi, Vikipeedia püüab aga indiviidi seisukohad täiesti välistada. Kui seda teeks kirik või valitsus, astuksime nende autoritaarsusele vastu, aga kui olukorra taga on uued tehnoloogiasaavutused, lepime sellega, sest soovime paista ajaga kaasaskäivad, uuendusmeelsed ja leidlikud. Inimesed võtavad omaks ideed, mis esitatakse neile tehnika kaudu, ehkki muus vormis tunduksid need täiesti vastuvõetamatud.⁴³³

Miks siis inimesed võtavad omaks autoritaarsed tehnoloogiad, mis ei austa nende privaatsust? Foucault uskus, et toimunud oli nihe jõustruktuurides – väliste mõjurite asemele, nagu kiriku või valitsuse võim üksikisiku üle, astusid sotsiaalsed suhted ja inimesed pidid hakkama end ise piirama ja tsenseerima, et olla ühiskonnas vastuvõetavad ja järgida norme. Autoritaarsed tehnoloogiad peegeldavad selles mõttes Foucault' ideed, et kaasaegsed sotsiaalsed suhted on üle võtnud traditsiooniliste jõustruktuuride mõju inimeste eraelule, suhetele ja sotsiaalsele käitumisele.⁴³⁴

Facebooki kasutajad mõistavad üldjuhul vajadust arvestada mitmekihilise kontekstiga alates sõbraloendist kui teatud liiki publikust ja lõpetades arusaamaga, et kõik, mis võrgus postitatakse, on potentsiaalselt avalik, isegi kui me arvame, et see on privaatne. 2012. aastal leidis ajakirjanduses aset väike torm seoses ühe Facebooki fotoga, mida jagati laiemale avalikkusele, ehkki see oli mõeldud ainult jagaja sõpradele. Tegemist oli jõulufotoga, millel üks perekond valmistas parajasti köögis jõuluroogasid. Fotol ei olnud iseenesest midagi ebatavalist ega häbiväärset. Probleem seisnes selles, et pildi postitas Facebooki asutaja Mark Zuckerbergi õde Randi Zuckerberg ja pildil oli ka Mark ise. Kuna Randi ei olnud tuttav Facebooki privaatsussätetega, ei teadnud ta, et tema sõprade sõbrad võivad samuti seda fotot näha ja enda sõpradele edasi jagada. Ta väljendas avalikult üsna tugevat pahameelt selle üle, et tema perepilti vaatasid ja jagasid inimesed, kellel selleks luba polnud. Kuna ta foto edasijagajat avalikult kritiseeris, jõudis intsident meediasse.

433 J. Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget*, lk 35.

434 M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1.

Randi Zuckerberg püüdis ajakirjandusapsakat siluda oma Twitteri kontol, kirjutades järgmist: „Digietikett: küsi alati enne luba, kui sõbra pilti avalikult jagad. Küsimus ei ole privaatsussätetes, vaid inimväärikuses.”⁴³⁵ Inimväärikuse puudumisest ja digitaalkultuuri etiketist sai sel hetkel patuoinas, ehkki tegelikult oli süüdi sotsiaalmeediaplatformi sisemine ülesehitus ja selle aluseks olev täieliku läbipaistvuse ideoloogia inimeste tõelise mina kuvamisel.

Kuidas me siis sellist kultuuri tõlgendaksime? Üks võimalus meie praegust olukorda mõista on vaadata meediumi metafoorina. Neil Postman on selgitanud: „Me ei näe loodust, intelligent-sust, inimkäitumise motivatsioone ega ideoloogiat nii, nagu need on, vaid nii, nagu meie keel määrab. Meie keel on meie meedium. Meie meediumid on meie metafoorid. Metafoorid on meie kultuuri sisu.”⁴³⁶ Postman järgis McLuhani koolkonna mõtteviisi, et kõige paremini saab kultuuri mõista selle kommunikatsioonivahendite kaudu, kuna neil on sotsiaalsete käitumismustrite üle domineeriv mõju.

Ernst Cassirer on märkinud samuti, et sümboolse reaalsuse arenemisega taandus füüsiline reaalsus tahaplaanile ja inimene hakkas suuremat tähtsust omistama kunstlikele meediumitele, näiteks kunstile, müütidele ja usunditele.⁴³⁷ Digitaalne kultuur ja identiteet, mis avaldub näiteks sotsiaalmeedias profili loomise ja seal teistega suhtlemise kaudu, on samamoodi täiesti sümboolsed, kunstlikud moodustised.

Meie digitaliseeritud kultuuri sisu moodustavad sümboolsed eneseesitlused, sümboolsed suhted, kuuluvused ja kogukonnad. Sotsiaalmeedia metafoorne funktsioon seisneb selles, et digitaalne identiteet taasloob eraisiku kui avaliku teenuse. Varem privaatsest minast saab kaup ja isikuandmetest meediasisu avalikkuse meele lahutamiseks ja ettevõtetele kasumi teenimiseks.

Doktoritöös käsitletakse tähendusnihkeid ning uue meedia ja metafooride mõju peamiselt kahe inimrühma – sotsiaalmeedia-võrgustike kasutajate ja seda kasutust uurivate teadlaste – seisukohalt. Artiklites arutluse all olevad teemad, kuidas sotsiaal-

435 T. Waserman, Randi Zuckerberg Not Happy...

436 N. Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, lk 15.

437 E. Cassirer, An Essay on Man.

meediaajastul identiteeti käsitleda, võib kontseptuaalselt jagada filosoofiliseks ja etnograafiliseks lähenemisviisiks. Artiklite kirjutamise ajendiks olid kutsed konverentsidelt ja ajakirjadest ning soov astuda akadeemilise kogukonnaga diskussiooni digitaalse identiteedi teemal, sest selle valdkonna vastu on praegu suur huvi ja käivad ägedad arutelud. Artiklites kajastatakse eri kogukondade vaatenurki ja lähenemisviise põhimõtteliselt ühele ja samale teemale.

Doktoritöö artiklid kanti ette kunstiajaloo, meediauuringute, digitaalsete humanitaarteaduste, narratoloogia, meediaökoloogia, popkultuuri, digitaalse pärandi ja meediafilosoofia konverentsidel, mille paneeldiskussioonidel käsitleti konkreetsemalt digitaalset identiteeti. Tänu avalikele ettekannetele, kolleegide tagasisidele ning võrgus ja trükisõnas avaldamisele on artiklid osa üleilmsest teadusvõrgustikust. Ehkki need käsitlevad eri geograafilisi piirkondi ja erialasid, hõlmavad need kattuvaid teooriaid, vaatenurki ja mõisteid, et anda ajakohane ülevaade selle kohta, mis on rahvusvaheliselt interdistsiplinaarses digitaalse identiteedi uuringute valdkonnas teoksil.

Teine peatükk „Digitaalse kultuuri diskursused“ („Discourses in Digital Culture“) on artikkel, mis avaldati Saksamaa kunstiajaloo ajakirjas *Kunstgeschichte*. Selles peatükis räägitakse digitaalsest kultuurist kui hiljuti sündinud uurimisvaldkonnast teadusfilosoofia seisukohalt, et tõlgendada hetkeseisu digitaalse kultuuri uuringute vallas. Digitaalse kultuuri uurimisel ei saa toetuda ühele konkreetsele meetodikale, sest selles vallas puudub ühtne diskursus ja valdkond on olemuselt interdistsiplinaarne.

Digitaalset kultuuri uuritakse mitmel erialal ja uurimismetodid tuletatakse kunstist, filosoofiast, arvuti-, humanitaar- ja sotsiaalteadustest. See näitab, et praeguses etapis on digitaalse kultuuri uuringutel mitu noore teadusharu tunnust – tuleb alles välja arendada sobiv metodoloogiline raamistik ja üldiselt aktsepteeritav paradigma. Kuhn nimetab küpseks teadusvaldkonna kriteeriumiks seda, kui kõikidel valdkondadel on olemas väljakujunenud raamistik ja paradigma.

Becker arendab Kuhni paradigma mõtet edasi kui näidet selle kohta, milline väärtus võib olla teadustööl, kui sellega koos

näidatakse, milline peaks töö olema, et kindlale distsipliinile midagi juurde anda.⁴³⁸ Teisest küljest võib võtta standarditud, teadusliku, traditsioonilise metodoloogilise uurimisraamistiku vajadust kui anakronismi, sest alternatiivi kasutamine võib viia innovatiivsete leidudeni ja anda uurijale suurema individuaalse vabaduse. Universaalselt aktsepteeritud paradigma⁴³⁹ väljatöötamine selleks, et arutada, vaadelda ja tõlgendada digitaalset kultuuri, ei pruugi killustatud postmodernistlikus ühiskonnas isegi vajalik olla, ehkki eri meetodiliste lähenemisviiside kombinatsioon võiks kasuks tulla, sest ühendaks ühe terviku eri osad.

Kolmas peatükk „Digitaalse identiteedi narratiivid“ („Digital Identity Narratives“) oli ettekanne Massachusetts Institute of Technology konverentsil „MIT7. Ebastabiilsed platvormid: ülemineku võimalused ja ohud“ („MIT7. Unstable Platforms: the promise and peril of transition“) osana paneelist „Ülemineku-narratiivid: digitaalsed elulood, digitaalsed elud“ („Narratives in Transition: Digital Life Writing, Digital Lives“). See artikkel on samuti metodoloogiline analüüs, milles vaadeldakse identiteedinarratiivide uurimise plusse ja miinuseid psühholoogia, etnograafia ja kirjandusteooria vaatenurgast. Narratoloogia uurib identiteeti kui isiklikku ja ka kui kultuurilist konstrukti, mis väljendab kindlat aega ja kohta ajaloos. Identiteedinarratiivide ehk enda kohta käivate lugude olulisus peitub selles, et need on inimloomuse lahutamatu osa – kuni selleni välja, et kui pole lugu, pole ka asja ennast.⁴⁴⁰ Identiteedinarratiivid on lood, mida me iseenda ja maailma kohta räägime, nende abil mõistetakse nii isikuid kui ka kultuuri ja antakse neile tähendus.⁴⁴¹

Tänu sotsiaalmeedia veebilehtede üha kasvavale populaarsusele leidub võrgus hulganisti identiteedinarratiive, mida võiks vaadata kui informatsioonijastu põhilist meelelahutusallikat. Digitaalse identiteedi kultuurilist fenomeni võrgus on uuritud mitme meetodiga, millest üks on digitaalnarratiivide analüüs.⁴⁴²

438 H. S. Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*, lk 138.

439 T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

440 P. J. Eakin, *Living Autobiographically*.

441 J. Brockmeier, D. Carbaugh, *Narrative and Identity*.

442 R. Page, *Interactivity and Interaction*.

„Digitaalse identiteedi narratiivid” on termin, mille abil analüüsitakse identiteedinarratiive sotsiaalmeedia-platvormides, näiteks sotsiaalvõrgustikes, nagu Facebook, ja veebipäevikutes, nagu Blogger ja Wordpress.

Kognitiivsed ja identiteediuurimused on kuulunud pigem psühholoogia ja sotsioloogia valdkonda, samas kui narratoloogia oli osa kirjandusteooriast. Need kaks valdkonda ei sobinud hästi kokku, sest psühholoogia ei võtnud identiteedi väljendamisel ja tõlgendamisel normist kõrvalekaldumisi nii kergekäeliselt omaks. Kirjanduskriitika oli ebakorrapärasuste suhtes leplikum ehk kui tõmmata paralleele, siis kirjandus oli justkui metsik loodus ja psühholoogia korrastatud aed.⁴⁴³ 20. sajandi keskpaiga postmodernistliku retoorikaga sobis subjektiivsele minale kohaldatav eraldatus ja killustatus ülihästi. Identiteet kui akadeemilise diskursuse kõneaine ei olnud enam midagi selgepiirilist ja määratletut, vaid seda vaadati voolava, pidevalt muutuva, oma ümb-rusega kohaneva kameeleoni sarnasena.⁴⁴⁴

Sotsiolingvistid on uurinud suhet identiteedi, keele ja diskursuse vahel ning nende erialal on toimunud mitu pöördelist muutust, samas kui varasemad seose mudelid identiteedi, lingvistika ja sotsiaalsete muutujate vahel on uute lähenemisviisidega kahtluse alla seatud.⁴⁴⁵ Võrgusuhtluse narratiivne struktuur on sotsiolingviste huvitanud seetõttu, et digitaalkultuuris on välja kujunenud ainulaadne keel, mille tekkimisele võisid tõiuke anda tehnoloogilised keskkonnad ise, luues suhtluse jaoks uue ruumi ja uue tempo. Kui William Labov uuris mustanahaliste ameeriklaste inglise keelt ja töötas sel moel välja sotsiolingvistikas kasutatava uurimismeetodi,⁴⁴⁶ siis võiks võrgukogukondade suhtluskeele uurimine aidata luua raamistikku digitaalse kultuuri uurimiseks. Diginarratiivid sarnanevad suurel määral pigem suulise kõne kui kirjaliku suhtluse ja kirjandusžanritega. Sellist erilist kirjalikku võrgusuhtlust on Irene Kacandes⁴⁴⁷ nimetanud „suuliseks

443 D. Albright, *Literary and Psychological Models of the Self*.

444 A. Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity*.

445 *Discourse and identity*.

446 W. Labov, *Language in the Inner City*, lk 354–96.

447 I. Kacandes, *Talk Fiction*.

kirjalikuks suhtluseks” ja Walter Ong⁴⁴⁸ „sekundaarseks suuliseks suhtluseks”. Suulis-kirjaliku kommunikatsiooniga on tegelenud sotsiolingvistid ja diginarratiivide uurijad, näiteks Ruth Page teoses „Interaktiivsus ja interaktsioon: Tekst ja kõne võrgukogukonnas” („Interactivity and Interaction: Text and Talk in Online Communities”)⁴⁴⁹ või Jannis K. Androutsopoulos töös „Sotsiolingvistika ja arvuti teel toimuv suhtlus” („Sociolinguistics and Computer Mediated Communication”).⁴⁵⁰

Tähendus muutub internetilaadses virtuaalkeskkonnas paljudel tasanditel, sest me püüame rakendada pärismaailma atribuute rikastatud virtuaalkeskkonnale. Tegurid, nagu aeg ja ajalisus, on digiteeritud, just nagu me ise oleme digiteeritud, et sobituda digikeskkonda, või nagu osa uurijaid on öelnud: „/.../ interneti puhul ei ole kõige olulisem mitte info digiteerimine, vaid inimeste digiteerimine.”⁴⁵¹ Erinevalt hetkelisest suulisest vestlusest, kus sõnad küll lausutakse, kuid neid ei salvestata ja need kaovad, salvestatakse digisuhtlus võrgukeskkonnas ja talletatakse see veebiarhiivides ja vahemäludes.

Uurimus „Digitaalne identiteet: Avalikkuse ja privaatsuse paradoks” („Exploring Digital Identity: Beyond the Private Public Paradox”, 4. peatükk) kanti ette Eesti Kirjandusmuuseumi ja Eesti Rahva Muuseumi korraldatud rahvusvahelisel konverentsil „Kultuurimuutused digitaalajastul”, mis toimus Tartu ülikoolis 2010. aasta aprillis. Artikkel avaldati ka ühe peatükina Peter Langi kirjastuse avaldatud raamatus „Digipööre: Kasutustavad ja kultuurimuutused” („The Digital Turn: User’s Practices and Cultural Transformations”). Artiklis leiab kinnitust, et samal ajal kui uus meedia muudab kultuuri, muundume meie infoajastu digitaalseteks identiteetideks.

Välja pakutakse ka lihtne digitaalse identiteedi määratlus, mis põhineb identiteediteoorial – digitaalne identiteet on see, kes me ütleme end olevat sellal, kui oleme võrgus. Digitaalse

448 W. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*.

449 R. Page, *Interactivity and Interaction*.

450 J. Androutsopoulos, *Introduction: Sociolinguistics and computer-mediated communication*.

451 M. Federman, *The Cultural Paradox of the Global Village*.

identiteedi loomine annab internetikasutajale võimaluse punuda peeneid, läbipõimunud võrke, kasutades selleks loomingulisi, seltskondlikke ja interaktiivseid platvorme, kus ta saab infot jagada ja avatud või piiratud publiku ees esineda.⁴⁵² Digitaalse identiteedi loomine laseb internetikasutajal võtta endale teise identiteedi või jääda anonüümseks ja sel moel on inimesel internetis rohkem vabadust oma identiteeti väljendada kui päriselus. Informatiivne enesemääramine⁴⁵³ on internetis paremini kontrollitav kui reaalses maailmas.

Võrgueksistentsi privaatsuse ja avalikkuse paradoksi iseloomustab hästi see, kuidas internetikasutajad ühtaegu infoga uhkeldavad ja seda varjavad. Selle vastuolulisuse tõttu on digitaalne identiteet hoolikalt kaitstud privaatsuse ja samas avaliku elu osa ning võrgu-mina luues vaagub inimene nende kahe vahel. On täiesti võimalik, et soov kogeda informatiivset enesemääramist läbi digitaalset identiteeti loomise, ütleb midagi meie tänapäeva ühiskonnas valitsevate pingete kohta. Digitaalse identiteedi loomine ning samaaegse privaatsuse soovi ja avaliku tähelepanu iha paradoks moodustavad laiaulatuslike sotsiaalsete ja kultuuriliste suundade seas kõigest ühe mikrokosmose. Niinimetatud jälgimis- või läbipaistvusühiskonnas⁴⁵⁴ on paljud demokraatlike riikide kodanikud kogenud märkimisväärset nihet selles, kui kergesti võib inimestelt võtta nende õiguse eraelu puutumatusel; vaujerism ei ole ainult läbiv teema meelelahutusmaailmas, vaid infoajastu aktsepteeritud sotsiaalne tava.

Uurimus „Digitaallaineil: Digitaalne identiteet kui ekstensioon“ („Surfing the Digital Wave: Identity as Extension Theory“, 5. peatükk) kanti ette Marshall McLuhani sajanda sünniaastapäeva auks korraldatud näitustest, konverentsidest ja muudest sündmustest koosneva üritustesarja konverentsil „McLuhani meediafilosoofia“ („McLuhan’s Philosophy of Media“) Brüsselis Vrije ülikoolis 2011. aasta oktoobris. Artiklis vaadeldakse McLuhani ekstensiooniteooriaid, mis on tehnikafilosoofial, fenomenoloogial ja geštaltpsühholoogial põhinevad meediauurimisviisid,

452 S. Cubitt, Digital Aesthetics.

453 A. F. Westin, Privacy and Freedom.

454 D. Brin, The Transparent Society.

mis seletavad, kuidas inimesed äärmiselt tehnilisele keskkonnale reageerivad.

McLuhani on avastanud mitu tagajärge, sealhulgas tuimeneimine, eneseamputatsioon ja ekstensioon. Need on inimese reaktsioonid McLuhani nimetatud elektriajastule, mida meie kutsume praegu infoajastuks või digitaalajastuks. Kuna nii indiviidide kui ka informatsiooni puhul toimub detsentraliseerumine, integreerumine ja tempo kiirenemine, ei ole kommunikatsioon enam tähenduselt spetsiifiline ja lineaarne, vaid simultaanne ja hajuv.⁴⁵⁵ Me oleme infost üleküllastunud, meid pommitatakse reklaami ja mitmesuguste inimsuhtluse meediumitega ja sisu kontekst või vorm kodeerib tähendust ehk teisisõnu on tegemist McLuhani kurikuulsa maksimiga, et meedium ongi sõnum. Lühisõnumi, säutsu, telefonikõne, faksi või seinapostituse sotsiaalne olulisus või teabe jagaja isiklik kaasatus on osa metateabest, mille puhul kontekst annab tekstile tähenduse.

Reaktsioonina suhtluskanalite arvu mitmekordistumisele ja nendest väljapaiskuvale üha segasemale, spontaansemale ja tähendusetaumale teabele muutub inimene tasakaalu säilitamise huvides tuimaks. Just nagu täheldatakse rämpsposti ja reklaamkirju, aga jäetakse need tähelepanuta, tehakse seda ka paljude teiste digitaalse suhtluse vormidega. Sedasi tekivad uued tajumuslikud tavad ning osa mõtlejaid on välja pakkunud, et kuna praegust ühiskonda mõjutab nii olulisel määral uus tehnoloogiline keskkond, vormivad kunst ja kommunikatsioon ühiskonna peagi enda näo järgi.⁴⁵⁶ Sotsiaalmeedia illustreerib seda ideed suurepäraselt, sest tegemist on keskkonnaga, kus kollektiivsusel, avalikult oma elu elamisel ja ettevõtete omavahelisel sõltuvusel on suurem väärtus kui individualismil, privaatsusel ja ärilisel sõltumatusel.

Artiklis „Sotsiaalvõrgustike etnograafia: Virtuaalne etnograafia ja digitaalne identiteet“ („Ethnographies of Social Networks: Virtual Ethnography and Digital Identity“, 6. peatükk), mis avaldati ajakirjas *Interartive: A Platform for Contemporary Art and Thought*, käsitletakse digitaalkultuuri uurimise etnograafilist

455 M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*.

456 H. H. Crosby, G. R. Bond, *The McLuhan Explosion*.

lähene misviisi. Virtuaalne etnograafia on refleksiivne ja kvalitaatiivne uurimismeetod, mis katab hästi vahendatud suhtlusvormide keerukuse, kogemused ja tajud virtuaalses keskkonnas.⁴⁵⁷ Artiklis liidetakse virtuaalne etnograafia ja kvalitaatiivne uurimistöö,⁴⁵⁸ et arutleda, kuidas loomingu lise taustaga kasutajad (näiteks kunstnikud, teadlased ja kirjanikud) eneseesitlusest räägivad ja kuidas nad tõlgendavad teiste identiteedi väljendamist sotsiaalvõrgustikes. Artikli kirjutamise eesmärk oli uurida põhjalikumalt kogemuste, tajude ja kehalisuse teemat digitaalkultuuris, kasutades selleks etnograafilist lähenemisviisi.

Kui me püüame kriitiliselt analüüsida inimkonna suhet tehnikaga ja selle mõju meie elule, peame kõrvale heitma eelduse, et tehnikal kui sellisel on mingisugused sisemised omadused, mis meid kuidagi mõjutavad.⁴⁵⁹ Selle asemel võime keskenduda eri võimalustele, kuidas inimese ja tehnika suhetest mõelda saab, ning meie eeldustele, hoiakutele, tajudele ja kogemustele.⁴⁶⁰ Just sel põhjusel osutub kasulikuks meetodiks etnograafia, mis aitab uurida, kuidas võrgukeskkonnas osalejad identiteedi väljendamist ja tõlgendamist kogevad.⁴⁶¹

Artikkel „Kunstnik ja digitaalkultuur: enesereklaami raskus sotsiaalmeedias“ („Artists, Academics and Digital Culture: (the strain of) Self-Promotion in Social Media“, 7. peatükk) kanti ette popkultuuri ja Ameerika kultuuri ühingu riiklikul konverentsil „Virtuaalidentiteet ja enesereklaam“ („Virtual Identities and Self Promotion“) osana paneelist „Kutsealase identiteedi väljendamine võrgukeskkonnas“ („Negotiating Professional Identities in Online Environments“). Artiklis uuritakse paradigmaatilist kultuurinihet reaalse ja virtuaalse maailma tajutud tähenduses ning seda, kuidas on ümber pööratud arusaam sellest, mis on relevantne ja mis enam mitte. Artikli allikmaterjal on 2012. aasta mais ja augustis Eesti Kunstiakadeemia ning Eesti Muusika- ja Teatriakadeemiaga seotud kunstnike ja teadlastega tehtud intervjuud. Intervjuude

457 E. Ardèvol, A. Roig, Researching media through practices.

458 Vt lisast C kunstnike ja sotsiaalmeedia uuringu intervjuu protokollid näidet.

459 K. Grint, D. Woolgar, The Machine at Work.

460 C. Hine, Virtual Ethnography.

461 E. Ardèvol, Virtual/Visual Ethnography.

lähivad teemad olid autentsus ja asjakohasus, enesereklaam ja enesetsensuur ning professionaalse identiteedi kujundamine.

Facebooki kasutamine ametialaseks enesereklaamiks tekitas pingeid inimsuhetes, sest nagu üks kunstnik ja teadlane selgitas, dehumaniseerib ja devalveerib uus digitaalne keskkond kunstniku kutse oma üritusele. Facebook laseb kasutajatel oma profiili ja ürituste kutsed teha kas privaatseks või avalikuks ja kutsuda teisi nii avalikele sündmustele ja näitustele. Kui kutse saadetakse ainult valitud Facebooki sõpradele, võib see tekitada pingeid, kui kutsuja ei saa sõpradelt kiitvat tagasisidet ega tuge. Kuigi teistes akadeemilist sotsiaalmeediat käsitlevates uurimustes⁴⁶² on leitud, et Facebook ei ole tavaliselt see platvorm, mida kasutatakse võrgus kutsealase identiteedi loomiseks, oli Eestis küsitletud kunstnike ja teadlaste seas lugu vastupidine.

Kogumiku viimane artikkel „Privaatsuseksperimendid avalikus ja kunstiruumis“ („Privacy Experiments in Public and Artistic Spaces“, 8. peatükk) on kirjutatud koos minu doktoritöö juhendaja dr Raivo Kelomehega. Artikkel põhineb ettekandel Massachusettsi tehnoloogiainstituudi korraldatud üleminekuajastu meediat käsitleval konverentsil „MIT8. Avalik meedia, privaatne meedia“ („MIT8. Public Media, Private Media“). Artiklis uuritakse, kuidas avalikus ja erasfääris kasutatav jälgimis-tehnoloogia ning digitaalmeediast põhjustatud sotsiaalsed ja kultuurilised nihked on privaatsuse vallas kaasa toonud suurema leppivuse. Suure hulga isikliku info usaldamine riigiasutustele ning Google'i- ja Facebooki-laadsetele eraettevõtmistele ei ole leidnud piisavat avalikku kajastamist inimeste privaatsuse ja tsiviilõiguste seisukohalt.

Kunstnike eksperimendid, näiteks Timo Tootsi (s. 1982) avalikus paigas eksponeeritud interaktiivne installatsioon „Memopol“ (2010), võiksid toimida muutuste katalüsaatorina, juhtides eksperimentaalse kunsti kaudu avalikkuse tähelepanu sellistele teemadele nagu privaatsus, tehnika ja jälgimisühiskond. Timo Tootsi installatsioonides „Autahvel“ (2009) ja „Memopol“ esitletakse vaatajale kunsti ja tehnika, privaatsuse ja avaliku teabe suhteid kättesaadaval, ent samas provokatiivsel moel. Interaktiivsete

462 K. Barbour, P. D. Marshall, *Persona and the Academy*.

installatsioonidega püütakse tabada tänapäeva inimese hirme ja muresid, sest demokraatlike riikide kodanikud on avastanud, et elavad tegelikult jälgimisühiskonnas, kus kõiketeadev valitsus neid Suure Vennana jälgib. „Autahvel” ja „Memopol”, mis põhinevad Eestis kohustuslikul ID-kaardi kasutamisel, muudavad isikliku teabe privaatsuse visuaalselt selgeks ja irooniliselt reformuleerituks.

Seda artiklikogumikku eristab teistest digitaalse identiteedi vallas tehtud uurimustest ehk selle interdistsiplinaarsus. Meediauuringuid on alati loetud interdistsiplinaarseks valdkonnaks, aga digitaalse identiteedi nähtust ei ole kunagi varem sel moel analüüsitud, et võetakse üheaegselt arvesse kommunikatsioonitehnoloogia ajalugu, tehnikafilosoofiat, virtuaalset etnograafiat, narratoloogiat ja meediaökoloogiat. Siin sisalduv kujunes idiosünkraatiliselt, aga just see eristabki seda kogumikku teistest. Artiklites sünteesitud leiud kirjeldavad identiteedi tähenduse ajaloolisi, eetilisi ja filosoofilisi tahke sotsiaalmeedia ajastul.

Mida enam on digitaalne kommunikatsioonitehnoloogia meie elu igasse, olgu siis seltskondlikku, ametialasesse, individuaalsesse või kollektiivsesse, aspekti tunginud, seda enam muudab see seda, kuidas me kogeme, tõlgendame ja loome oma keskkonnas tähendusi. Inimesi on identiteediküsimused lummanud aegade algusest saadik; sellega on tegelenud filosoofid, teadlased, kunstnikud ja intellektuaalid, kes on sellel teemal loonud elava arutelu traditsiooni. Alates koopajoonistustest kuni sotsiaalmeediaprofiilideni välja oleme alati kasutanud tehnikat, et edastada oma mõtteid ümbritseva maailma ja meie rolli kohta selles maailmas.

Ajalooliselt on lugude jutustamine olnud iga inimkultuuri oluline osa ja nõnda on jutuvestmine inimkultuuri määratlemise kultuuriülene vorm. See kanal, mille kaudu lugusid on edasi antud, on pidevalt arenenud, samas kui kõigist meie tehnoloogilistest edusammudest hoolimata väljendavad lugu ja loo vestja püsiva ja järjepideva kultuuriühikuna oma aega.⁴⁶³ Tehnoloogia muutumine on endaga alati kaasa toonud kultuurilise ümberkorralduse, sest uued kogemused muudavad meie maailma- ja minapilti.

463 J. Brockmeier, R. Harre, Narrative: Problems and promises...

Digitaal tehnoloogia kuldajastu leiab meid ekraani tagant võrgus profiile loomas, et teistega võrgus suhelda, võrguväliselt relevant sust luua ja kasutada meie käsutuses olevaid vahendeid oma elu parandamiseks. Kipume unustama, et tehnoloogiline areng on faustilik tehing, sest iga eelise ga kaasneb midagi negatiivset.⁴⁶⁴ Me ei tohi tähelepanuta jätta ka seda, kuidas meie tööriistad meid ära kasutavad.

464 N. Postman, Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change.

Appendix A

Figure 10. Facebook Status Update Prompts

Three examples of Facebook status update prompts are shown, each with a 'Post' button and a 'SORT' dropdown menu below it.

Example 1: Update Status Add Photos/Video
What's happening, Stacey?
Post

Example 2: Update Status Add Photos/Video
What's going on, Stacey?
Post

Example 3: Update Status Add Photos/Video
How are you doing, Stacey?
Post

Figure 11. Facebook Identity Profile Formation

A screenshot of a Facebook profile page for Stacey Koosel, showing various sections for identity formation:

- Work and Education** (Edit): Graduate School, Estonian Academy of Arts, EESTI KUNSTI. Add a Job.
- Living** (Edit): Add Your Current City, Add Your Hometown.
- Relationships and Family** (Edit): Add Your Relationships.
- History by Year**: 1982 Born on June 12, 1982.
- About You** (Edit): Write About Yourself.
- Basic Info** (Edit): Add Languages, Add Religious Views, Add Political Views.
- Contact Info** (Edit): Facebook (http://facebook.com/stacey.koosel), Add Mobile Phone, Add Screen Name, Add Address.
- Favorite Quotations** (Edit): Add a Favorite Quotation.

Figure 12. Facebook Profile Personal Wall

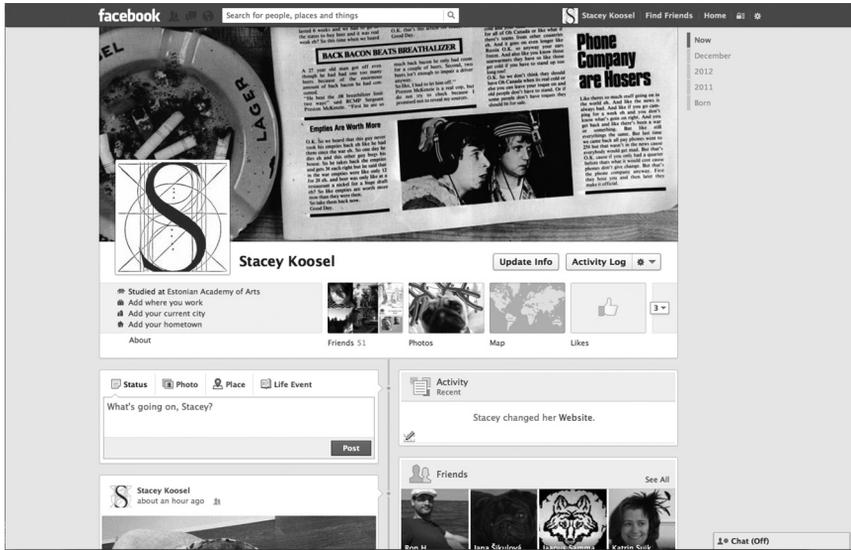


Figure 13. Facebook News Feed

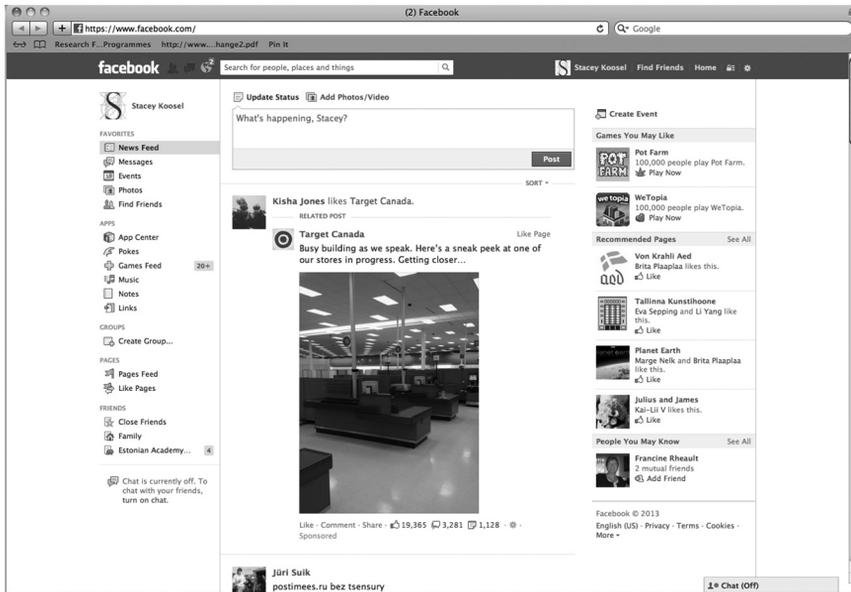


Figure 14. Facebook Event Invitation

facebook Search for people, places and things Stacey Koosel Find Friends Home



Galerii "Loop" artist talk Public · By Kumu kunstimuseum Laura Kuusk invited you.

Events Join Maybe Decline

Going (30)

- Laura Kuusk (Invited You)
- Camille Laurelli

Maybe (19)

Invited (852)

- Stacey Koosel
- Jaanus Samma
- Martin Rünk
- Andres Lõo

Export · Report

Friday, March 1, 2013 4:00pm until 6:00pm

Miniatuurne kunstikeskus Loop Kumas

Kumu kunstimuseumi fuajees saab vaadata miniatuurset kunstiruumi Loop, kus hetkel on eksponeeritud prantsuse kunstniku Tristan le Brazi näitus „Lost & Found“. Loop on tänavalt leitud ja kunstiruumina kasutusele võetud endine nukumaja, mis reisib oma näitustega tihti lennuki käsipagasis või postipakis, võimaldades mobilsust ning näitusest osasaamist erinevates riikides. Nii näitus kui ka kohtumine kuraatoriga on tasuta!

Reedel, 1. märtsil kl 16 kohtuvad Kumu haridusk...[See More](#)



Recent Posts

Chat (Off)

Appendix B

Sample Interview Transcript from Artists, Identity and Facebook

This qualitative study was conducted by conversational interviews using a standard set of questions, with artists and academics and artist-academics, most of whom are associated with the Estonian Academy of Arts or the Estonian Music Academy between May and August of 2012.

The interviews were conducted in face-to-face conversations, which were audio recorded and transcribed. Follow up questions and contact with the subjects of the study was done through e-mail, or in a few cases Facebook. The subjects were picked with intended random selection utilizing the “snowball” sampling technique, where the interview subjects were asked to select or refer the next potential subject.

All subjects of the interviews were asked the same set of standard questions, but were encouraged to elaborate and discuss their own ideas and interpretations. The questions asked were intended to reveal how the individual used Facebook, how they presented themselves to others and read (or interpreted) the profiles and self-representation of others. The questions probed for emotional responses “gut reactions”, as apposed to formulated, tactful, factual responses. The study is entitled “Artists, Identity and Facebook” (2012) and is in the possession of the author.

Sample Interview Transcript

Recorded: 2012-05-17 16:34

Interview: Audio length: 19 minutes and 8 seconds

Respondent: Artist and Academic Female, 30 years old.

Interviewer: Basically I just want to talk to you about Facebook, what you think about Facebook...

Respondent: O.K

Interviewer: So the first question is, what do you think is the use of Facebook – how is it useful for you?

Respondent: Well, in fact it's useless, it's not so useful for me!

(laughter) Because I feel there usually I go to search people what I know, and then to see what my friends of friends is, and you know about birthday or something – maybe good reminder for you, somebody's birthday is coming and you say "Oh Happy Birthday" that is the thing you don't really write in your own calendar but here you can find it.

But really nothing useful unless maybe I organize something, you can inform people, oh I have this event I can send invitation through Facebook. But still for me Facebook is not so useful in a sense you send invitation for everybody, but it's not like face to face and people know – so you're not sure if these people see the invitation or if the people saw but just ignored it, didn't want to come, so I feel in this sense Facebook is useless because it just gives people an excuse to avoid something they don't want to say "no" to the face. So I am feeling that it makes things more complicated then it should be.

Interviewer: How often do you check your Facebook? Daily? Or many times a day?

Respondent: Daily, once I get Internet it's not like this – of course for a while I was so busy that every time I turn on the computer with connected Internet. But now I feel this is wasting time so I check it less and less.

Yes, it's a poison – that is a good word because it poisoned my time. I do really feel like every time I check, oh I'm wasting

time. You know because usually there isn't so much updated, and even if I post something, if for example I have one hundred friends in the list, then maybe only one of them reply. Maybe not on time, it takes a long time but in the end I feel it's a waste of time.

Interviewer: You feel like there is no communication? You feel like it's not a good tool to communicate with people then?

Respondent: Depends on what part of the program you use from there, there is one personal message I can only say that is communication with people, but still it's private one to one, not like Facebook one face to faces. So communication in Facebook, if I take this use of messages, it's good but then it's the same as sending an e-mail to somebody, then I'd rather just send an e-mail to somebody.

It's the same isn't it? Because Facebook people have to log into Facebook, and they probably check other information before they see the message and answer you. And also there's, also Facebook is doing a Skype thing, online you can chat with somebody online, you can see who is on Facebook. So sometimes I give people (hesitate) for example if I post some event that I have and then I can see who is online at the same time. So if I see those people don't come to my event.... Then I think you must have saw this, why didn't you come, you know?

Interviewer: Yeah that's an interesting point, kind of a paranoia – because you know that they know that...

Respondent: Yeah and then, because in Facebook when checking you cannot hide, you can't put yourself invisible I think. You are either online or offline. So if you want to check who's online, you have to go online first.

Interviewer: Do you have any privacy concerns about Facebook? Do you only show certain pictures or do you only say certain things?

Respondent: Yes, I don't really think – first in the beginning I was feeling fine you know, I was just like, also, a fresh man of Facebook "Oh it's nice to show some photos!" Also at that time I was pretty young and liked to show pretty faces and parties and everything and show how much people I have as friends.

But know it's like, why should I show these things? They are a part of my privacy. Who are my friends, I don't necessarily let the other people know because you think, alright this person is my friend but is not the other of my friend's friends, so this kind of collapse. It collapsed some other friendship and then the photos, now I don't think I post so much photos of my faces or my friend's faces because really it's not needed. I think Facebook, now I really want to ask why do people create Facebook.

Interviewer: Yes

Respondent: What is Facebook for? For Facebook you want to see different Faces and call it Facebook – or really build a communication tool for the Internet. But if so there are a lot of Internet communication tools like e-mail or Skype or MSN those such things and so I feel Facebook is more and more interrupting the privacy for each person then there, so I don't think it won't really evolve like this.

Interviewer: Do you worry sometimes about the way the people might perceive you? Or do you worry about how you present yourself?

Respondent: Well yes I really worry, because they can take a photo of mine and they can change it, change the head so it's somebody else or change the body "Oh look what she did!"

Respondent: You know this is so because I also know how to use Photoshop! I can make the same joke to anybody else! But of course different people the standard of morality is different.

Interviewer: Can you describe, just in your own words, from your own, sort of, point of view how do people communicate who they are on Facebook? How do they tell others about themselves?

Respondent: Oh you don't have to tell, you check their portfolio and some people write (in sarcastic voice) "Oh I'm working in this such organization, Oh I'm working here and blah blah."

Or some people they don't write that, so then you start to... But still you can still more or less figure out from this person's friends then you know what kind of friends he usually have and you can figure out. This, I think in Facebook is training you to become a detective! You can trace something before you ask!

But if you see, it's showing, because if I have my friends circle like this, and I can show to the rest of the students "Oh look I have this kind of connections".

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, so it's about who they know instead of who they are.

Respondent: Yeah

Interviewer: Is there anything that people do on Facebook that bother you? Things that you don't like when people do?

Respondent: Oh yes, yes yes. Some photos, now I think they are so silly. Some things they post I think, such useless things, I think people don't think about what they say about what they write there. They feel like they are talking to somebody but at the same time they think they are talking to nobody, they think, nobody will see this so I will write it to explore, explore my own feelings. So I feel that when some people write "oh today I'm so tired, but I have some work I have to do" or like this, and why should you write like this? Because everyday Facebook has this: What do you like? What do you think? But to who? Why should I do this?

I have my friends in reality not in this digital life, I can tell to my friends, and my friends can probably give me immediately like answers or response for me and consult me with words but with Facebook nobody answer, oh alright, if they answer with time, unless you are checking if someone is online, but still it's better you are speaking with friends. Don't really have to write a post to let everybody know "Oh my drama, Oh I'm so sad" So all of your friends know you are sad, so what?

Interviewer: Yeah

Respondent: You're going to do something with that right, so I think it shows more people's weakness then there shows uh....

Interviewer: Why do you think this weakness is being shown? Do you think that these people are lonely? Or do you think that they are just exhibitionist?

Respondent: Well I think a few reasons why probably is that they are so bored themselves, even bored people around them, they have nothing to do – that's one reason. And mostly maybe the teenagers and students are doing this or maybe the housewife

who has nothing to do, then when they are in front of the computer they are doing this or at the office they are so bored of work and they are doing something like this.

Interviewer: Yeah

Respondent: But of course I think in most companies they won't allow their staff to go to Facebook when they are working. So I think this is one of the reasons, the other reason is people are so empty in the head they don't know what to do. Then they go do this. It's so ignorant, or how to do you say, it's a little bit sad. I remember there was a story from my childhood when my grandmother said: Ok there's a mother she lost her son by accident, she first talked to her friends and everybody and then she repeated and repeated again then the people – nobody listened to her anymore, because they know this story and they think she has some mental illness and she has to do something, but not really, she just kept repeating this thing.

So I think this Facebook in a sense creates people to repeat themselves without finding a solution. It's not a place to put a problem and discuss with people, a place to put all the rubbish in the world in your mind or in your feelings there. In a sense it's like wasting the space also.

Interviewer: But why do you think people like it? What do you think...what are the positive things that make people feel good about it?

Respondent: Feel good about it, and themselves – to show they are important, but they are not because they see "oh I have so much friends" then they feel themselves good. Some people really want to collect friends, so no matter who they know now they just add a friend. But the thing you do in reality is like meeting a person on the street then you are friends, but it's not – but in Facebook it's easier you just click "Add as Friend" then it's done!

It could be you'll build a connection but of course you don't pay attention if it's a real friend or what the friendship is. Also it's easy for them to post photos on Facebook and show "Oh I dress like this today, or I have this apartment today or drank like this, I have friends like this" it's easy to do because it's a

quick way but still it loses the value of the real real...sense of this.

Interviewer: Mmhmm So it's kind of a reality devoid of meaning, so the meaning is taken out of the word friendship and the meaning is taken out of the word...

Respondent: Yeah, also I think so and nowadays this digital life, like life in front of the TV or computer has taken most of the time for us that used to be...like...I'm feeling it's bad because people's communication, ability of communication has gotten less and less. Because it is easier to type on the computer than you say, for example some words people can write to you but not to speak to you.

Like this kind of thing happens, in Facebook it happens like this, even for your own friends. You are feeling "Oh he or she can write more for me" but then when you meet there is no worth, you are worthless, you have no worth, why? OK people probably, I think people lose the ability of talking this is the thing. But this talking and languages is our natural tool for us, this computer is just an additional tool but now we are so depending on this.

Also we put so much time on this, we think this is the fast way, the quick way to communicate because you don't have to go to your friends house, or knock on the door, or waiting and then sit down and have coffee and talk but just you take some words and the message is going there already but really this process is not important of going to meet your friends and to have something together and then to share a conversation and also the temper of the atmosphere that shares the moment, that also has a part of the conversation. But sending a message quickly or a photo...mmmm (disapproving) I think it's not really the way for human to...

Interviewer: Yeah very interesting, it's sorta a very weird detail of communication...it's not the whole thing, it replaces that or...

Respondent: For example, a very primitive example...OK before we have television, before we have uh telephone, they would write a letter to people. And at that time the delivery was very slow! And you know you wait!

Interviewer: Yeah, a long time.

Respondent: Yeah, a long time but you are expecting this letter and when this letter comes to your hand you are probably reading it through one time, one more time and more and more to get the message and also from hand writing those characters symbolize how people write for you, she's coming down writing this e-mail or she's in a rush to write this message, or in a hurry or she's worries about something, or something.

Interviewer: (agreeing)

Respondent: Or even she write this letter with...good hands... or if she's you know, hands are steady, this also reflects how she makes the message and everything, but...

Now computers send e-mails, people are not paying any time waiting for this e-mail because it's very quick, you know. And of course you don't feel directly from the paper or the character, you can't feel this paper apart from maybe language because everything is computerized and you even see if you have a mistake. In this sense you lose the meaning, and also people lose the waiting...

Interviewer: The anticipation!

Respondent: Yeah and just quickly, tomorrow she will answer, I don't have to wait. But no considerable distance.

Interviewer: So now there's no distance and no anticipation...

Respondent: Yeah...(thinking)...good in a sense for some businesses good but for some things not...

Interviewer: Yeah like for personal relationship, it's not uh..

Respondent: Yeah, for some also with Skype, this Internet online chatting program, for me if I'm up and I'm talking with my parents, we can talk in the moment and hear each other in the moment. But if...uh...imagine the first time, without the computer, when they are waiting me and I go home, of course long distance travelling and maybe I don't go so often, every few years and see them, and this emotion you know how exciting, and the emotion and age you see from the face – that kind of emotion teaches us more!

But now, it's so easy, you just open the Skype and you just see each other and sometimes I can really be really...not angry but

emotional with them. You lose the respect, “Oh we haven’t seen each other in so long” and you want to be good and you want...

Interviewer: Yes, yes that is so interesting I’ve never thought of that. That’s very interesting.

Yes, it’s a very good point it’s true – when you see people for the first time, it’s exactly, for weeks you are trying to be very nice and everything, but the Skype thing I also find it irritating somehow, I don’t like it so much. It’s uh!

Respondent: Yeah and also the technology it isn’t perfect. When the condition is getting bad then you can’t hear each other or....

Interviewer: Or you can’t see each other, and it freezes then you have to restart...

Respondent: So in this way, the technology it can really help us or destroy us.

List of Figures and Illustrations

Cover

Brecht Vandembroucke, "The Anti-Social Effects of Social Media". – The New York Times 25 April 2012.

Introduction

Figure 1. Nam June Paik, "TV Buddha" (1974). – Artworks and actions, <https://gindunscombe.wordpress.com/2012/09/23/stedelijk-museum-amsterdam-reopening> (accessed 7 July 2015).

Chapter 6

Figure 2. Facebook Profile (2012). – facebook.com

Figure 3. Facebook Update Status (2012) . – facebook.com

Figure 4. Facebook Information Blanks (2012) . – facebook.com

Chapter 7

Figure 5. Peter Steiner, "Nobody Knows You're a Dog". – The New Yorker 3 July 1993.

Figure 6. Roz Chast, "The Ungoogleable Man". – The New Yorker 8 April 2010.

Chapter 8

Figure 7. Estonian Information System. X-Road. – <https://www.ria.ee/x-road> (accessed 8 April 2015).

Figure 8. Timo Toots, "Memopol" (2010). – <http://works.timo.ee/memopol> (accessed 8 April 2015).

Figure 9. Ilmar Saabas, Validation of the Public Transportation Card (2013). – Eesti Päevaleht 9 January 2013, <http://epl.delfi.ee/news/eesti/validaatorid-kipuvad-streikima?id=65505006> (accessed 08 April 2015).

Appendix

Figure 10. Facebook Status Update Prompts (2012) . – facebook.com

Figure 11. Facebook Identity Profile Formation (2012). –
facebook.com

Figure 12. Facebook Profile Personal Wall (2012). – facebook.com

Figure 13. Facebook News Feed (2012). – facebook.com

Figure 14. Facebook Event Invitation (2012) . – facebook.com

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STACEY KOOSSEL

The Renegotiated Self: Social Media's Effects on Identity

Stacey Koosel's doctoral thesis is a collection of articles that explore the effects of social media on personal identity. The communication of identity narratives online has become abundant with the increasing popularity of social media. Social media enables users to build profiles based on their personal identities, making identity play a primary source of entertainment in the information age.

Topics such as privacy, ethical use of information, authenticity, social control, self-expression, self-censorship and other media affordances have all, subsequently, become important issues. The topic of 'identity' is used as a framework through which social media use can be analysed. The cultural phenomenon of digital identity is explored in a collection of seven articles using different approaches, including media ecology, the philosophy of technology, virtual ethnography and artistic research.

The articles raise questions about the ideology of identity creation in social media, by interviewing artists on how they use Facebook, pointing out paradigm shifts and paradoxes in contemporary culture and the discussion of other research in the field of digital culture.

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