

**Media Anthropology Network  
European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)**

**E-seminar Series**  
<http://www.media-anthropology.net/workingpapers.htm>  
**E-seminar 33**

**Jenny Cool**  
**University of Southern California**

***The mutual co-construction of online and onground in Cyborganic: making an ethnography of networked social media speak to challenges of the posthuman***

**Discussant: Antoni Roig Telo**  
**Open University of Catalonia**

**21 June - 6 July 2010**

**Introduction**

**Postill, John** <J.Postill@shu.ac.uk>  
Tue, Jun 22, 2010 at 1:51 AM

Dear All

Welcome to the 33rd EASA Media Anthropology Network e-seminar which starts now and will run on this mailing list till Tuesday 6 July 2010.

Jenny Cool (University of Southern California) is presenting a working paper titled "The mutual co-construction of online and onground in Cyborganic: making an ethnography of networked social media speak to challenges of the posthuman" - see abstract below. Jenny has a PhD in Social Anthropology and an MA in Visual Anthropology from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. She is currently doing research on the micro-blogging service Twitter. Her doctoral work, completed in 2008, was on Cyborganic, "an influential early Web community" and the subject of her present working paper.

A PDF of this paper is now available on our site at <http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars> (with thanks to Philipp Budka)

Antoni Roig Telo (Open University of Catalonia) will act as discussant. Antoni runs the Audiovisual Communication Programme at the Faculty of Information and Communication, Open University of Catalonia. He is interested in new forms of media creation and production, particularly 'digital cinema'. His PhD thesis (2008) was entitled "Cap al cinema col.laboratiu: pràctiques culturals i formes de producció participatives" (Towards collaborative cinema: media

practices and forms of participatory production).

For those of you who are new to these e-seminars, this is how they work. First, our discussant posts his or her comments on the paper. Once the presenter has responded the floor is then opened to the entire list for a period of two weeks. When contributing, please remember to keep your posts brief and on-topic, with no attachments and cc'ed to me (j.postill@shu.ac.uk) so that I can be alerted to any glitches with the listserv. (You can see transcripts of previous e-seminars on our website).

I'd now like to invite Antoni Roig to post his comments!

John

ps If you haven't yet had a chance to read the paper, you can still do so now!: <http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

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#### Abstract

Cyborganic, the subject of this study, was a San Francisco community whose members brought Wired magazine online, launched Hotwired; led the open source Apache project; and staffed and started dozens of Internet enterprises-from Craig's List to Organic Online-during the first decade of the Web's growth as a popular platform (1993-2003). The imaginaries, practices, and genres of networked social media developed in this group figured in the initial development of Web publishing and prefigured contemporary phenomena such as Facebook and a host of other media collectively known as "Web 2.0." While my ethnography examines the symbiosis of online and face-to-face sociality in the growth of Web publishing, this paper focuses on that symbiosis at a more micro-level, looking at specific forms and practices of networked social media in Cyborganic that have become predominant on the contemporary U.S Internet. Anthropologists have challenged the assumed "isomorphism between space, place, and culture" (Gupta and Ferguson 1992: 34) and have theorized "technological infrastructures as sites for the production of locality" without a necessarily geographic referent (Ito 1999:2). Despite this decoupling and the tendency to associate online sociality with fragmentation and dematerialization, my Cyborganic study demonstrates that the intermediation of online and onground can work to consolidate and extend, rather than attenuate, affiliations based on place and embodiment that anthropologists have long seen as defining sources of identity and cultural difference.

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<http://lists.easaonline.org/listinfo.cgi/medianthro-easaonline.org>

### Discussant's comments

**Antoni Roig Telo** <aroigt@uoc.edu>

Tue, Jun 22, 2010 at 10:12 AM

Dear friends at the Medianthro mailing list,

First, I'd like to thank John for offering me the possibility of joining this e-seminar in the role of discussant. I'll try then to do my best to open up the discussion for this wonderful and suggestive paper by Jenny Cool, entitled '*The mutual co-construction of online and onground in Cyborganic: making an ethnography of networked social media speak to challenges of the posthuman*'. The paper is just a glimpse of a 10 year ethnography of the Cyborganic community, which makes the reading a very intense one (more on which later). The point Cool is trying to make is highlighted in different ways through the paper: demonstrating through her case study that the entanglement of online and onground practices, oriented through affiliations -firmly rooted in place and historically and culturally situated-, "reconfigures experiences of place, identity and embodiment, without dematerializing these sites of subjectivity or rendering them obsolete as sources of anthropological insight" (7). The consolidation of these affiliations through the intermediation of online and onground is what drives the author to stand for a posthuman approach -as critical social theory- to the anthropological subject. Drawing from Katherine Haynes, Cool challenges the reinscription of the liberal humanist subject (constructed as unified, knowing and autonomous) from the 'human' to the 'disembodied posthuman' grounded in discourses on disembodied subjectivity and technological determinism (15-16). Quite graphically, in the end, Cool expresses her aim to bring back the flesh into the discussion of the diverse and complex forms of techno-sociality. Which is especially relevant as Cyberorganic prefigures in many ways contemporary social media, showing proto-exponents of (micro)blogging or Facebook's personal status.

The scope of the Cyborganic ethnography is fairly impressive, even if in the short form of a working paper it is difficult to account for the whole complexity of the practices involved. And so it is how the author visualizes the online and face-to-face dimensions of the community and its expanding network of projects, communities and firms. As a media scholar who found in Lisa Gitelman's definition of media a particularly useful support for my research on participatory culture, the notion of 'place' as 'collocation' of different agents and activities has turned out to be particularly suggestive and connected to actual practices. It is also very relevant to me as an academic at a virtual university like the Open University of Catalonia, an organization created at about the same time as the Cyborganic community, with a clear bid for ICTs and characterized by tensions coming from its localized regional context (a firmly rooted Catalan university

oriented to the global market) and the struggle to reconcile the online and onground dimensions in its micro-level practices.

In order to serve as a starting point for the discussion, I'd like to point out some questions, some of them addressed simultaneously to the author, some of them with the major interest to gain in insight of her arguments on the interrelation of the virtual, the material and the body through practices.

For the author:

- First of all, I'm missing a wider explanation of the evolution of these practices through time, and particularly, the actual interrelation of online and onground practices. If the role of place (as physical collocation in particular places around the San Francisco area) is evidenced as instrumental in the Cyborganic case and if we get an exact impression of the onground and online entities that constituted the community, I'd like to know more about the actual interrelations between both domains, given that the focus of the paper is on specific and intertwined practices.

- I've also been wondering about normativity and hierarchical relationships between the community, understood as an organizational form, and how it is related to practices.

- Drawing from your own ethnographic work, in what ways do you think the Cyborganic community is related to 'the global'? For instance, what particularities are observed in cases like new members of projects coming from outside San Francisco influence area or active members moving to other areas?

For the participants:

- I guess that the posthuman approach adopted by the author will lead us to some interesting discussion, even if I'm not completely sure about the exact sources of possible controversy. My question then is very general: in what ways does the notion of the posthuman posed by the author clash with other accounts of technologically-mediated sociality from an anthropological point of view?

- How do you think this ethnographic work can be connected to the online/ onground practices related to the use of current mobile and locative technologies?

- How can we relate a historical case like Cyborganic with practices around the emergence and consolidation of creative clusters around the world, following the notion of 'creative cities' by Richard Florida at a macro-level, but, more interestingly, going down to the level of micro-practices? As a reference, among many other possibilities, I'd like to point out Brennan-Horley and Luckman's ethnography around the case of Darwin (Australia), René Barownick, Noam Andrews about socio-spatial practices in specific quarters in London and Berlin (both from 2009) or Mark Gibson's Creative Suburbia 'A Critical Evaluation of the Scope for Creative Cultural Development in Australia's Suburban and Peri-Urban Communities' (2010).

I'm sure many more topics will arise, as this paper has a lot to say and suggest from different angles, be it from the perspective of the creative industries, practice, identity, virtual communities, labour/ leisure social space, the redefinition of the notion of 'place', embodiment, agency, the local and the global, the intertwining of online vs onground (or what has been also labelled as 'onlife') ?

Thus, I warmly encourage you to contribute to the discussion from now on. Thank you in advance!

Antoni Roig

Information and Communication Department  
Open University of Catalonia ([www.uoc.edu](http://www.uoc.edu))

## Response

**Postill, John** <J.Postill@shu.ac.uk>

Tue, Jun 22, 2010 at 12:04 PM:

Many thanks to Antoni for those thoughtful comments. It's now over to Jenny Cool for a response

John

On Thu, Jun 24, 2010 at 2:55 AM, **Jenny Cool** <thejennycool@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Media Anthropology mailing list,

I'm grateful for this opportunity to discuss my work and for the generous comments and provocative questions Antoni Roig has posed. I'll limit my response here to the questions he has directed to me as author.

(1) First, Antoni has asked for more detail on the historical evolution of Cyborganic's online and onground practices and their interrelation. As he notes, it is a challenge to convey the findings of a 10-year field study within the scope of a single paper. I will provide more detail here, but for those who are interested, a complete history and description of Cyborganic can be found in chapters 4 and 5 of my dissertation which is online at <http://cool.org/chapterguide/>.

The Cyborganic project was launched in 1993 by Jonathan Steuer who was at the time Wired magazine's "Online Tsar" (<http://www.links.net/vita/cyb/jss/>). Cyborganic's central premise was that online and face-to-face interaction are mutually sustaining and can be used together to build uniquely robust communities. The project was to use computer-mediated communication, not to transcend geographical place, but to build a local, networked community. Those who led the

project wanted to create such a community in their own lives. But they also wanted to demonstrate the possibilities of using technology in this way out of a sense that others would benefit from Cyborganic's example. The project was pursued as a business startup and though that enterprise provided the impetus and framework (both technical and imaginative) for the community, the entrepreneurial and utopian aspects of Cyborganic were symbiotic and can only be understood together. Entrepreneurial and idealistic motivations came together in the project to create Cyborganic as a "demo model" of the kind of local community participants wanted in their own lives and also as a "demo" for the community-hosting business that Steuer envisioned.

Steuer recruited collaborators to the Cyborganic project, including this ethnographer, among his friends, neighbors, and colleagues. Thus, face-to-face social networks were the initial vectors through which the project grew. Mailing lists were Cyborganic's first online forums and were instrumental to its spread beyond the households on Ramona Avenue. Though there is some fluidity in the categorization, lists were of three types: community lists, business project lists, and lists run by members for their own projects. The first mailing lists were set-up in early 1994. The Cyborganic website and Space bar chat were launched about a year later in April 1995. Even after the launch of these other online forums, face-to-face sociality remained central. Cyborganic's weekly potluck dinners (TND) were the most tangible manifestation of the community and served as a key entry point through which new members were introduced to group's online venues as these informant comments demonstrate.

"My friends moved here for the summer. They arrived Wednesday night. On Thursday night they went to a TND. On Friday night, they had housing in a good place, near public transit, and soopah cheap. That's the fastest (and cheapest) housing I've ever seen anyone get. Thanks TND!" (John Shiple, e-mail to sf@cyborganic.com mailing list, May 11, 1996).

"NDs played an interesting and important role for many of the people in the community because so many of them were new to San Francisco. It was a time when many (myself included) were making that transition from high school or college into being an "adult" and striking out on your own career-wise, financially, new city, etc." (Heidi Swanson, questionnaire response, September 19, 2004)

Space bar, the chat forum on which I focus in this working paper, was accessible from any networked computer and some of its regulars lived outside the Bay Area. Yet, because of the preponderance of Bay Area members, the chat was place-centric, if not entirely place-based, as one of space bar's early regulars describes:

"Space bar has gone probably through 2 or 3 distinct changes [since] we first went online. There was a lot of light-hearted word play and the mood could really stretch from total light-heartedness to very serious discussion. For the first few months that was the general tone and, of course, the general welcoming of new people into it because it was expanding. It probably went from a few tens of people to a few hundreds logging in, and then, in terms of regulars, from probably 4 or 5 or 6 to probably 15 or 20 regulars. And it started changing slowly... It became much more popular with people in physical proximity to the Bay Area, maybe San Francisco itself. What started happening was more sort of SF, San Francisco-centric conversation and

topics coming up, which was a novelty when it first got up, even for someone who's never been there and has no idea where people hang out and all that, it's amusing and entertaining and interesting to listen to people talk about what they did when they were all at lunch and they are now talking about it on space bar, that's fine. And that grew into a whole new area of interaction all by itself and I think that started some people feeling more left out than others, almost as if they were kind of pushed out."

(Sean Robin [pseudonym] interview, October 21, 1996)

While this out-of-towner speaks of feeling "pushed out," others were pulled in to Cyborganic through the chat, further illustrating the interrelation of online and onground proximity, or co-location.

"My friends Mark, Brian, and Fixer, all live together now because of space bar and the community. That's how they met up and found each other and found a place to live. Another friend, Heidi, was living in Idaho. It was cold, her job was not working out, and she was totally isolated. She came across space bar and she found her way here. She wound up moving in with me, in my house, because I had a room open."

(Ryan Powers in Davidson 1996,

[http://www.rheingold.com/electricminds/html/vcc\\_profile\\_1048.html](http://www.rheingold.com/electricminds/html/vcc_profile_1048.html))

In my working paper (pp. 9-13) I describe how the space bar chat was integrated in the daily work and lives of Cyborganic members, showing more specifically the symbiosis of online and onground practices I've outlined here.

(2) In his second question, our discussant asks me to say something more about hierarchical relations within the Cyborganic community as a social form. While the Cyborganic business project had a formal corporate hierarchy led by a CEO (Steuer) and 4 principals who reported to him, the overall community was characterized by a more informal structure of personal power that I liken to Marshall Sahlin's (1963) concept of "big man" authority (chapter 6 of the dissertation). While Steuer was Cyborganic's "big man," space bar's "big man" was Caleb Donaldson. Anyone on the Internet could login to space bar but users were limited to channel 1 until Donaldson, "the spaceman," verified their accounts, at his sole discretion. Donaldson administered the chat from the time it went online in 1995 until its demise in early 2009. After the Cyborganic business filed for bankruptcy in October 1997, space bar was ported (moved) to a new server that belonged to one of its regulars (James Home), but Donaldson remained in his role as administrator and ultimate authority.

Status, in the Weberian sense of "an effective claim to social esteem... typically founded on a) a style of life, hence b) formal education... and the corresponding forms of behavior" (Weber 1978:305-6) was key in Cyborganic's informal hierarchies. Cyborganic itself was a status group within a larger status group of geeks who rose to prominence along with the Internet on the basis of technical knowledge, occupational prestige, and style of life. Geek status was of value to Cyborganic's communitarian project in attracting volunteers and media attention, which further bolstered the group's prestige. In this sense, the rise of the geeks, or "revenge of the nerds," narrative that was a fixture of 1990s popular culture advanced the project in relation to the outside world. Within Cyborganic, however, claims, to geek status were not equally distributed

and thus served to distinguish internal in-groups and support informal hierarchies that were sometimes at odds with community building efforts. Space bar exemplified the in-group, or status clique, in the practice of “toying with newbies in channel one,” described in my working paper (pp. 13-14). The practice was sanctioned not only by the participation of Cyborganic staff, but also by those who endured it and became members of the community, via space bar or other channels.

Even those who spoke about “getting burned” in the chat curbed personal resentment, expressed embarrassment, or apologized for trespassing, in view of the status of space bar regulars, both in that forum and in the community more generally.

In terms of Cyborganic’s communitarian project, I see two significant tensions in the fact that geek status was a key differentiator within the community. First, contributions to the community project had no bearing on status except in so far as the work itself was accorded geek status (i.e., was technical). While recruiting volunteers for non-technical tasks such as cooking and cleaning for TND required sustained effort and became increasingly difficult as Cyborganic grew, the group continued to attract volunteer systems administrators (sysadmins) a decade after both the community and attention to it had faded. Thus, Cyborganic’s central practices and imaginaries of status fostered contributions of the same kinds of technical labor and skill fostered by the entrepreneurial milieu, rather than those specifically required by the community project. The second tension I note is that in-groups and informal hierarchies entail practices of communication, inclusion, and exclusion that often become fault lines in conflicts and are also the context for breakdowns in communication and trust in which conflicts arise.

(3) Finally, our e-seminar discussant asks how the Cyborganic community is related to “the global” flow of members into and out of the San Francisco area. I’m not sure I fully understand the question, so will be brief, especially as I’ve already written more than I’d planned.

School ties (both high school and college), and kinship were important vectors through which Cyborganic attracted members from outside the Bay Area. Though marriages and births far exceed them in number as of this writing, during its most active period (1994-1997), siblings were the most commonly occurring kin unit in the Cyborganic community. For example, the Steuer siblings (Jonathan, David, and Ellen), the Nelsons (Jonathan and Mathew), and the Haigs (Dan and Bagus) were all central actors in the Cyborganic project. All attended the same public high school, Nicolet, in a suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. These Cyborganics connected the group in networks of others from Wisconsin, with the result that approximately 15 percent of those with Cyborganic homepages in 1996 hailed from that state. Other Cyborganics similarly brought school friends, relatives, and co-workers into the community. These ties reflect the fact that Cyborganic was largely an age cohort--most members were between 18 and 28 years of age in the mid-1990s--and also demonstrate the extension of traditional place-based affiliations in networked sociality.

I will end my response to Antoni’s discussion here, save to say that I am eager to hear what others have to say on the broader questions he poses about the posthuman and “consolidation of creative clusters around the world.”

Cheers,

Jenny Cool

## **Discussion**

On Thu, Jun 24, 2010 at 5:40 AM, **Postill, John** <J.Postill@shu.ac.uk> wrote:

Many thanks to Jenny for that detailed response to Antoni's comments!

The floor is now open to further questions and comments. To post please write concisely to [medanthro@easaonline.org](mailto:medanthro@easaonline.org) (with cc. to me). Relevant bibliographic references and URLs are always welcome

John

On Sat, Jun 26, 2010 at 10:06 AM, **Postill, John** <J.Postill@shu.ac.uk> wrote:

As we haven't yet had any comments or questions from the floor (in future we'll try not to hold e-seminars during the World Cup and Wimbledon season!), perhaps I can offer one or two reflections on Jenny Cool's paper.

First of all, what an impressive long-term ethnographic engagement! Like Antoni, I want to read more about these people you spent so much time with, so those additional texts you point at are much appreciated. I very much enjoyed how you capture the historical moment of the 1990s surge in internet innovation in one of its key 'technopoles', as well as the specific biographical circumstances and relations of the Michigan cohort and others who joined Cyberorganic.

This suggests to me, as pointed out by Antoni, a great potential for comparative ethnohistorical research in other technopoles (with the difference that future researchers will no longer be able to 'be there' ethnographically during that formative first decade of web history). How much do we know about simultaneous developments in other locales during this period?

That said, as I was reading I found it difficult to connect some parts of your theoretical discussion around the (post)human condition with the preceding ethnography. I was fine with the idea that online and offline practices and identities are mutually constitutive but I couldn't quite connect the geeks in your story to the abstraction of a 'liberal humanist subject' and its alternatives. I was particular puzzled by the paper's concluding sentence:

"In recognizing that subjectivity is constructed through the mediation of material and symbolic realms, we are well positioned to contest, with Hayles, the "teleology of disembodiment" that reinscribes the liberal humanist subject into conceptions of technologically-mediated subjectivity and sociality."

I was wondering if you could clarify this last point, and perhaps more generally how the theory and ethnography relate to each other.

Meanwhile, let's have some more comments and questions, the more the merrier! (the network never sleeps)

John

On Sat, Jun 26, 2010 at 11:20 AM, **Daniel Taghioff** <danieltaghioff@yahoo.com> wrote:

Hi Jenny and list

I found the paper is very, very interesting, and it carries a very strongly outlined account of its positioning. I agree strongly with the wish to locate embodied yet distributed agency, but the paper is problematic for someone who agrees with the position it takes, as it lacks sufficient ethnographic detail to bring out the implications of this particular take in terms of how to approach the detail of the material.

This is entirely understandable in a short paper on a [very] long ethnography, but I feel that in order to properly engage with the paper, I would like to see how this sense of what it is to be post-human changes the way in which Jenny approaches the particular forms of human sociality, subjectivity and agency that she is working with.

The sections on overlapping more-or-less technologically mediated forms of sociality are interesting i.e. the diagram of circles (n.b. bear in mind that a meal is also a technologically mediated event, predicated on various material traces of human agency exercised in the past), but it does not really answer the question of how these forms are mutually constitutive of one another (how were interactions in the TND carried over into the other spheres/circles/fields for instance.)

There is a glimpse of this in the discussion of the Space Bar: There was a sense of how having knowledgeable colleagues co-located with you as you work changing how you work, something that chimes with my own experience of being an internet-based worker.

But "forms of communication" is too narrow frame through which to analyse the mutually constitutive relations between online and offline fora. It keeps the focus on "channels" and "fields" (the diagrams are possibly indicative of this) and takes it away from "relays" or "narratives". Latour labours these points in his approach to the detail of how human agency is implicated with the material in "Re-assembling the Social."

The point is I would like to see how interactions played out as sequences of events through these various fields and channels, because I suspect the narratives and courses of events were more determinant than the fora, portals or channels (albeit inflected by them of course, which is where it gets really interesting in terms of Media Anthropology).

This is again the point about practice-related media. By looking at the twists and turns of events, a sense of how these forms of sociality are mutually constitutive, as embedded in life stories and

chains of events, is, to my mind, more likely to emerge, and ironically the decentered and recentered character of these stories / relays and the agencies and subjectivities they are implicated with, are also more likely to emerge.

This in some ways recalls Castell's "Space of flows leading to a flow of spaces" line, although flow is unfortunate as a metaphor, as it excludes transformation of both the underlying stuff and the channel. I think that "media" and "field" are also unfortunate [conduit-prone] metaphors in some ways, as they key into this "information flow" metaphor, and this also leads to a sense of networks as objects rather than activities. I am not claiming that Jenny falls into this, her position is far too thoughtful for that, but I am saying that these considerations underline how important going into the relays and narratives is in order to thoroughly avoid strange attractor of such transparency and exchange metaphors (space is another such).

Daniel

Daniel Taghioff

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On Sat, Jun 26, 2010 at 12:56 PM, **Genevieve Perreault** <gperreault8@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Jenny,  
Dear all,

I suppose I have to introduce myself before asking a question! I'm Genevieve Perreault, mother back to school since 2007, student in anthropology, still undergraduate, at the University of Montreal. I follow discussions here since some months and I want to thank again Dr. John Postill to let me be on this list.

Some publicity! You can find me at : <http://umontreal.academia.edu/GenevievePerreault>.

So, my question to Jenny.

I would like to understand why, as anthropologists, we're interested particularly in the business community on Internet. I mean, why focus on that part of the community on the Web, why that precise choice. I mean also, why focus on the ways to generate profits. I'm sorry if I'm clumsy in my question, and I confess I don't really know how to ask without leaving this feeling. Probably, in fact, my question is, what is your fundamental idea, what justifies your choice?

My question(s) reflect(s) in some parts my own discomfort with the subject.

Very best,

--

Genevieve Perreault

Etudiante en anthropologie, Université de Montréal

«Le temps n'est pas un obstacle mais un moyen qui permet la réalisation du possible.»

**Misha Patel** [misha@mishapatel.orangehome.co.uk]

Sent: 26 June 2010 19:16

My familiarity with this subject is quite faint, but in relation to this conceptualisation of the 'cybo-organic' I can't help but link the idea of 1920s German cine-film experiences in relation to individual as liberal humanist participant actively functioning in a context of constricted daily behaviours (screen-based lifestyles and affect therewith on sociality and interactions with a diverse register of separate lived contexts, all negotiated against a backdrop of internalised information intake and distal social interaction accommodated by technological convenience.

There is a brief screening on the Southbank in London this week featuring some 1920s German film-making.

Also close to this subject, although in a different medium altogether, a book by Yevgenii Zamyatin (1924) called "We" on the inner thoughts of an individual and group of individuals negotiating a starkly convenient and liberal technologically-driven practice in function and societal living.

misha

On Sun, Jun 27, 2010 at 1:16 AM, **Jenny Cool** <thejennycool@gmail.com> wrote:

John, Daniel, Genevieve, Misha: thank you for these most discerning comments, questions, and suggestions. Your responses have given me more valuable direction for revising my working paper than I'd hoped. I'm grateful for your time, energy, and thought in engaging the work.

I want to set aside the theoretical discussion of the (post)human and focus first on the Cyborganic ethnography. My plan in this paper was to use what I'd learned from the Cyborganic case about the mutual co-construction of online and onground experience (studied as imaginaries and practices) to speak to what I gloss in the paper as "challenges of the Posthuman." Thus, the first task was to encapsulate my ethnography and give a thumbnail account with just enough ethnographic detail, so there would also be room for analytic and theoretical discussion within approx. 20 pages. No doubt this is a challenge with which all ethnographers grapple.

Clearly, my capsule account needs work. Daniel Taghioff's response makes it clear how the approach I've taken to narrowing/simplifying the case study ironically leaves out exactly the events, "relays and narrative" required to show the mutually constitutive character of online and onground I argue for.

I see now that the conceptual vivisection/visualization of ethnographic data in Figures 1, 2, and 3, unwittingly works to disconnect onground from online and reify units of analysis—e.g., firms, particular forms and channels such as space bar—in ways that cut against my overall analysis.

I don't believe the long account of Cyborganic (my dissertation) suffers these pitfalls, and while I'll point to that work in this discussion, I understand the task in a paper like this is to abstract the longer ethnography into a suitable form and length. It's a task I haven't yet managed successfully but Daniel's posing of the problem is ripe with suggestions for remedy. So, that's the spirit of this reply.

In the long account of Cyborganic (<http://www.cool.org/chapterguide/>), I present the sequences of events and narratives that Daniel calls for by writing the ethnographic case into two main chapters. The first (chapter 4) gives what I call a “network history,” that is, a narrative account of the individuals, firms, projects, and communities that connected Cyborganics to each other and to San Francisco's Web industry in the 1990s. This is basically a narrative account of Figure 3 in the paper. For easy reference, this figure can be seen at:  
<http://www.cool.org/chapterguide/images/figures/fig4oneNetworkFirmsProjCom.jpg>

[Note the online figures linked in this email are numbered differently because they're from the dissertation].

Second, I follow the chronologically organized network history, with a synchronic description (chapter 5) titled: “The Cyborganic Whole: Business and Community, Online and Onground.” The title signals that, while I had to divide Cyborganic into constituent parts to write about it, the divisions are purely heuristic: Cyborganic can only be understood as a whole in which the onground and online dimensions were as inseparable and mutually constitutive as the entrepreneurial and utopian ones. In the working paper, I diagram onground parts in Figure 1 (<http://www.cool.org/chapterguide/images/figures/fig5oneCyboRings.jpg>) and online parts in Figure 2. In the dissertation, however, I work to avoid the binary opposition of onground/online (and impression that these add up to some sort of structural-functionalist whole) by framing the Cyborganic subject a bit differently. There I write:

“Just as its business and community, Cyborganic's online and offline components overlapped and were mutually constitutive. Yet, representing these various phenomena ethnographically requires some analytic vivisection and, for heuristic purposes, the Cyborganic whole can be divided into three parts which can be seen as different interfaces through which social actors participated in the community: (1) the business project; (2) the place-based, face-to-face community; and (3) the online community.” (2008: 203-204)

Here the triad of parts and conceptualization of them as interfaces, rather than structural units of social morphology, works against problems of the kind Daniel points to with his keen observations on “conduit-prone metaphors” and the way social forms are identified in the paper. Whether for cell phones, video recorders, or operating systems (e.g., the GUI), interfaces mediate between the embodied realms of clicking, button-pushing human actors and the representations of the system, which also have a material body, or physical substrate in which they are instantiated. Interfaces mediate material and symbolic, but these do not divide neatly as onground and online [N.B., This is a connection point to the “posthuman” part of the paper.]

My attempt to make one Cyborganic forum, space bar, representative of the whole left out the stories and events that show the mutually constitutive relations among online and offline fora. I do, however, have a diagram (not included in the working paper) that better encapsulates Cyborganic without stripping away the ethnographic detail for which I hear a call in both Daniel's and John's responses. This is a figure showing "Cyborganic History and Evolution." – <http://www.cool.org/chapterguide/cybolutionH-place.jpg>

This visualization was created from a group history elicited at an open meeting on December 19, 1996 and attended by fifty-three Cyborganic members. It is structured as a timeline with years along the x-axis. Along the y-axis are categories at once concrete and analytic/interpretive (to varying degrees). These are:

- (1) "Big Ideas, Themes", i.e., social imaginaries and narratives;
- (2) Reflections and Trends the group identified as significant;
- 3) Stories and Events, detailed in chapters 4 and 5 of the dissertation, events are listed in this table: <http://www.cool.org/chapterguide/images/tables/Table4twoCyboMilestones.jpg>
- (4) Place, Onground Collocation, i.e., representations of the buildings in San Francisco that housed Cyborganic
- (5) Challenges Cyborganics felt their community was facing at the time (hence all entries cluster around 1996 when the history was elicited.)

Even without the full ethnographic narrative, I think this iconographic visualization of the collaborative group history gives some in vivo sense of Cyborganic and its mutually constitutive online and onground practices, events, and imaginaries as lived social phenomena.

Let me add to this timeline view of Cyborganic a few more clusters of ethnographic detail to bolster the sense of "embodied yet distributed agency," as Daniel so brilliantly puts it.

First, TND (Cyborganic's weekly potluck dinner) served as the face-to-face context in which Cyborganic's online aspects were introduced, modeled, and practiced. Here's a capsule description that gives a sense of the vital symbiosis of face-to-face and online:

"Cyborganic has combined the block party, performance art, and mass communication into an electronic garden... Thursday Night Dinners opened the door to face-to-face partying and cyberspace exploration. Using a server located in the kitchen, guests could explore cyberspace in the context of friends and informal socializing. Nesting the virtual experience in a social situation humanized an otherwise potentially impersonal experience." (2008: 218)

A couple more examples of onground-online symbiosis...

- i) space bar was always very active during TND when people who were physically together in

the same place, simultaneously conversed in the chat. This practice was common on the earlier “vrave” (<http://hyperreal.org/raves/vrave/>) a chat that was part of the SF Rave scene (on the timeline under 1991) that people logged on to from and during raves.

ii) Though itself an embodied, face-to-face event, TND was organized and publicized through the TND mailing list (distinct from other community lists); and sign-ups for volunteers of “guest chefs,” “Djs,” and “swabmasters” (clean-up crew) were later handled via a web-based system.

iii) In talking about the community mailing list (cc list), most of my informants noted that face-to-face interaction worked to temper their reactions to/readings of mailing list posts. For example: “you have to kind of get used to everybody's email persona....and.....not go off the wall when Rebecca posts something that is like really weak.. I think after meeting Rebecca, I understand more about (laughs) you know, what she's, what she's trying to represent in email, whereas I was maybe a lot more intolerant prior to meeting her. Now I take it with a grain of salt, you know...” (Dave McClure, interview, October 7, 1996)

iv) Finally, a point about something I touch on in the working paper in discussing presence casting and how space bar’s Porthole and Cadet Detector displayed presence across media (from the chat to the web). These sorts of “transmedia” practices, as they might be called, don’t only cross technologically mediated boundaries, such as a telnet chat and web page. For instance, at its height, the cc mailing list could be, and occasionally was, used as instant messages (IMs), text messaging, and, later, Twitter came to be used. From 1995-1999, most Cyborganics followed the community mailing lists (the cc list, tnd list, and local San Francisco and New York lists, in near real time. This was certainly the case during the day when most members sat working at a computer for long stretches. In this embodied-online social context, one could, as Marjorie Ingall does in the email below, post a message with the expectation of practically instantaneous reply.

-----  
From: snarly@snarly.com  
Date: Fri, 4 Dec 1998 13:03:50 -0800  
To: sf@cyborganic.com  
Subject: this is embarrassing...  
quick, what's the name of the gas station on the corner of 16th and guerrero? i want to call them and ask how much a smog check is, but um. gah.  
-----

Marjorie’s post was answered within 12 minutes with the name, street address, and phone number of the gas station in question. 15 minutes later, another poster gives directions to a station that does “\$20 smog checks” and tips on another place to take “a car that is borderline.” Later that night, a post with the revised subject header “Smog Checks - Re: this is embarrassing...” warns to “Avoid the place on 16th and Van Ness.”

A number of embodied practices, imaginaries, and identities are implicit in this email thread. First, it takes place on the geographically specific sf list that was created after traffic on the cc

list grew heavy enough, and membership spanned groups in New York (ny list) as well as San Francisco (sf list). The creation of the sf list, and Marjorie's agency in using it (rather than the TND list or cc list that went to both sf- and ny lists), reflect the place-aware use of lists. The revised subject header is also significant. Why does the poster feel the need to change the subject line when his email is squarely on topic? My interpretation is it is because he is posting almost 8 hours after Marjorie's initial post (his mail is time stamped: Fri, 4 Dec 1998 20:44:01 -0800). His post falls outside shared expectations of response times and he indicates this by revising the subject line to the more general topic of "Smog Checks." In these various ways, the conventions of list usage reflect particular embodied, temporal-spatial conditions.

I see in this thread about local gas stations and smog checks the use of a mailing list to support a practice and style of collocation (onground and online) that has subsequently taken other forms, such as text messaging and Twitter. The key to Twitter's proliferation is its RSS feed which makes this type of near real time, short-form, collocation maximally configurable, but the social practices and imaginaries it bespeaks, preceded this particular technological implementation.

In the next day or so, I'll try to say something to John's question about connecting posthuman theory to some of this ethnographic detail, and Genevieve's questioning of the focus on Cyborganic as a business project. Until then, I'll leave off by thanking Medianthro for the wonderful opportunity of this e-seminar.

Jenny

2010/6/27 **Elisenda Ardèvol** <eardevol@gmail.com>

Thanks Jenny for your interesting and in depth paper about a "onlive"community. Like John, I wonder about the need to theorise about a posthuman subjectivity that seems to emerge from the relationship with communication technologies. For me, there is a potential danger in doing generalizations from a case study, no matter how in depth it has been, about subjectivity, because it seems that the diverse practices and relationships with technological communication devices on the Internet can be somehow categorized as homogeneous, that is for the Internet as a whole.

I agree that Internet cannot be analyzed as a cultural artifact in isolation of other communication technologies and media practices, neither as a world apart from daily life, but I think we must be careful to generalize our findings to define all internet practices.

The first ethnographic studies on the Internet were focused on the study of virtual communities or specific technological platforms (Baym, Reid, Pagnatella...) to grasp common cultural traits. Later, the approach included the ethnographic study of the everyday life of the actors, but in general the dichotomy between online and offline was still a reference whereas the field was still considered in relation to the "virtual community" of origin. For example, some members of an online group were followed in their offline meetings, but the fieldwork was focused around a determinate website, online game or specific online-offline communities.

Usually, Internet studies have centred the focus on the analysis of a "place" in the sense of a

determinate platform (one virtual community around a chat or a forum, Second Life, YouTube, MySpace, FaceBook, etc.) considering that they are "bounded places" where people interact. But I have not read many works that pretend to analyze dispersed practices across different sites/places. I think this is so because Internet researchers have been largely attached to the idea of "community" to understand social interactions online. So, we have been looking for bounded "communities", whether they interact online and offline or on ground. By decentering structural elements of Internet such as sites or platforms, we recenter the analytical lens on the processes and practices that interweave material objects, technological procedures, body and discourse without necessarily talk about community building. This deliberate re-positioning also enables us to decenter some of the polar oppositions (such as offline/online) that limit conceptualizations of identity, agency and subjectivity.

On the other hand, virtual ethnography has been broadly discussed during the last ten years. For example, Hine herself (2005), has reconceptualized her methodological framework from virtual to connective ethnography, following Leander and McKim (2003) regarding the dichotomy online/offline point out that it cannot be an assumption of the ethnographer but that we must be concerned with describing the participants practices to create, bound and articulate social spaces. Their shift, therefore, is to identify 'siting' as productive process, instead of identifying 'sites'. This 'unbounding' ethnographic practice from location (physical or virtual) does not suggest that location does not matter, but rather, that it cannot be used as a pre-defined self-evident boundary for fieldwork. The task of the researcher then, is to study 'siting' processes as part of the ethnographic analysis, rather than taken site for granted. Even more, online/offline relationship are not fixed, depend on the different kinds of social processes; generalizations cannot be drawn for all kinds of online activity and subject's experience with media. Jenna Burrell (2009), also has work with the concept of connective ethnography, saying that it is not only a question of mixing methods and combine a online and offline strategies, but to deal with the notion of fieldsite in a constructive way. For her, instead of thinking of the fieldsite as a 'place', it can be defined as a network as a strategy for locating ethnographic research. Doing 'connective ethnography' means, among other things, to rethink the role of the researcher. For her, the fieldworkers' movements are no longer co-extensive with the way the social phenomenon under study extends across time and space. Constructing the fieldsite as an heterogeneous network allows to map out the social relationships of the subjects, but also their connections to material and digital objects and to physical locations.

#### References:

KEVIN M. LEANDER & KELLY K. MCKIM, 2003. Tracing the Everyday 'Sittings' of Adolescents on the Internet: a strategic adaptation of ethnography across online and offline spaces. *Education, Communication & Information*, Vol. 3, No. 2, July 2003.

Christine Hine, 2005. *Connective Ethnography for the Exploration of e-Science*.  
<http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue2/hine.html>.

Jenna Burrell, 2009. *The Field Site as a Network: A Strategy for Locating Ethnographic Research*. *Field Methods* 2009; 21; 181 originally published online Feb 18, 2009.

On Mon, Jun 28, 2010 at 2:21 AM, **Don Slater** <D.Slater@lse.ac.uk> wrote:

Just writing to second Elisenda's remarks, and just to add: the problems of defining or bounding a fieldsite is no different (let alone self-evident) in the case of explicitly techno spaces than in any other anthropological objects of knowledge. Our objects are constituted through the very same processes we are trying to study, and are therefore emergent, fluid, contested, reflected upon and respresented. Imposing terms like online and offline in the abstack doesn't solve the problem of defining fields at all but merely displaces the central ethnographic issue: how are different spaces defined, interconnected. This is an empirical question. We are always in the game of understanding how people make and unmake, stabilize and contest the constellations we or they label as 'places' or spaces or sites or communities.

It's really the question of 'context': research feels safer if we assume a context that contains the object we want to study, and to which we can relate it for purposes of explanation and generalization (there is an offline real world that with which we must situate online sociality, or vice versa). That is sometimes a necessary methodological manoeuvre, or a rhetorical shorthand so that one can write intelligible sentences. But we know that life is not that simple.

Don

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On Mon, Jun 28, 2010 at 3:02 AM, **Pablo Santcovsky i Reschini**  
<pablo.santcovsky@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear all,

I'm just a PhD candidate working on risk communication but I would like to pose a question about this offline/online ontological problem. I think that this question relates to the classical problem between realism and idealism, quoting Don's text:"there is an offline real world that with which we must situate online sociality, or vice versa". But even in the offline world we have that epistemological classical problem about ideology, social perception of reality, the construction of social discourses, etc. I guess I would feel "safer" assuming that the online world is just an expression of social reality, as it is our "offline" experience. I mean... Is it necessary to change our philosophical grassroots to face virtual ethnography research?

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On Mon, Jun 28, 2010 at 3:16 AM, **Sarah Pink** <S.Pink@lboro.ac.uk> wrote:

Dear all

I wanted to just to follow on from some of the methodological comments, as I think the discussion is going in a really interesting direction.

Don writes that 'We are always in the game of understanding how people make and unmake, stabilize and contest the constellations we or they label as 'places' or spaces or site or communities', and I think this is an interesting way to think about it. In my book **DOING SENSORY ETHNOGRAPHY** (2009) which is not about virtual worlds, I have suggested thinking about the idea of 'ethnographic places' which draws together those constellations (of things processes, discourses etc etc) that are interwoven in any research encounter. This offers us an interesting way of thinking about the 'contexts' of research because it doesn't close off one locality from another but looks at how things come together and are involved with each, other, share trajectories etc. Following Doreen Massey's ideas about place/space being open and unbounded can offer useful theoretical foundations for such an approach. I discussed these ideas in relation to virtual ethnography in a conference paper given at the first International Visual Methods Conference in Leeds last year (in a panel organised by Elisenda Ardevol and Adolfo Estela), and will be working on these questions more next academic year.

I would really like to hear from anyone who has worked on and written about questions of space and place and or used spatial theory to understand how we do virtual ethnography - or perhaps better called research that interfaces off-line and on-line  
Sarah

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On Mon, Jun 28, 2010 at 9:19 AM, **Don Slater** <D.Slater@lse.ac.uk> wrote:

Hi Sarah -

Not sure this is entirely on-target, but your remarks called to mind a quote from Mark Poster, one of his 1996 articles on the virtual: 'Just as virtual communities are understood as having the attributes of 'real' communities, so 'real' communities can be seen to depend on the imaginary'. Against the grain of most of his other work, in the passage this is drawn from, Poster is using the online-offline distinction not in a realist mode, as a real distinction, but rather as a heuristic device: studying on-line spaces sensitizes us to how 'virtual' our real spaces are (ie, they are constellated, not pre-given).

I like the idea of 'ethnographic places' in that vein - thinking about how our objects of study are organized by us and 'them'. And in this vein I'd offer a paper I wrote with Tomas Ariztia (though not strictly 'online', the study treats as virtual the spatial constructions that many of the actors involved treated as real:

Slater, D. R. and T. Ariztia-Larrain (2009) 'Assembling Asturias: Scaling devices and cultural leverage', in I. Farias and T. Bender (eds.), *Urban Assemblages: How Actor-Network Theory Changes Urban Studies* London: Routledge.

In the context of a study of youth culture in Asturias, where we were commissioned to study 'local youth' in the context of 'global culture', we tried to unpick how different actors (youth, our clients, us) defined places like Asturias, and how they constructed both scales and places within those scales. The aim was to bring the different constructions of scale and place into some kind of dialogue, rather than treat one (our client's sense of themselves as global) as the context into which to set the other (youth as merely 'local'). It was all very Latourian, and I do think ANT generally gives one the scope to treat fundamental terms as entirely open to analysis and re-invention.

don

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On Tue, Jun 29, 2010 at 4:23 AM, **Fran Barone** <fbarone@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi everyone,

I have not yet introduced myself to the list, so, briefly, I am a PhD Candidate in Social Anthropology at the University of Kent researching internet use in Catalonia.

I would like to thank Jenny Cool for her excellent paper. It is refreshing to read a perspective on the internet that is firmly rooted in place, as this has been a key focus in my doctoral research. There are few better examples of being in the right place at the right time as the Bay Area and SF in the early days of the web. Cool's connection to this technologically mediated community and the behind-the-scenes look that her extensive ethnography offers into the evolution of the web make for especially interesting reading.

As others have commented, at times I would have liked greater attention to place and the interaction between online and offline/onground. (Jenny has addressed this since I began drafting my response, so I will not to belabor the point). However, I would like to add that I found the diagram in Figure 3 (p. 6) showing interlocking and overlapping networks of activity and community to be helpful in visualizing place-based and online connections. This, along with Thursday Night Dinners, revealed 1) how truly entwined into Bay Area and SF culture these pioneers were; and 2) how the development of the www was contingent upon locality through this small group of co-present individuals with a common purpose.

I appreciate Jenny's focus on the tools that predated many so-called new and innovative features of Web 2.0. I have always found Web 2.0 to be a rather inaccurate label for this reason. The jump from Guestbooks, IRC idling, presence casting, IMs and away messages, to Twitter, Facebook and "ubiquitous" computing is not as great as the hype surrounding it. I can see the ideas of open channels, back channels and "always on" channels presented throughout the paper as being very useful in further analyses of Twitter and the continuing evolution of the redundantly named "social web".

Antoni has asked us to respond to the idea of the posthuman. I have not previously found this term (or "cyborg") helpful, believing instead that humans remain \*human \*in their engagement with technology and that technology has humanity built into it by default. Suggesting that technologically mediated communication pushes us towards/into a \*post\*-human state of being has seemed to me to sidestep, rather than tackle, the ethnographic and anthropological challenges inherent in online-offline research. I am therefore grateful for Jenny's meticulous unpacking of the term, separating the critical social theory of the "posthuman" from what I had been equating to the "transhuman" (p. 14), and calling attention to "situated subjects, embodied and emplaced in the ontological nexus of space, time, and social being" (16-17). I am not sure that I am sold on this approach, and will need to re-read it to grasp the finer points. Nevertheless, I still end up where Jenny does in wishing to "read and write the flesh back into the genealogy of contemporary forms of techno-sociality" (16).

To answer Sarah Pink's question:

I am addressing urban space and place in relation to the internet in Catalonia. However, I did not only look at spaces as open and unbounded as you suggest, but also at how urban spaces can be divided, closed, contested or ignored and/or made human (or not). By mapping technology use and the representations of self and society on the web alongside geographical maps of the city, I

am hoping to reveal a complex layering of locality. In short, the practice of making a city a “place” does not stop offline, but continues onto the web.

Sarah – do you have a copy of your conference paper? I would very much like to read it.

Best regards,

Fran

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On Tue, Jun 29, 2010 at 8:47 AM, **Dan Perkel** <dperkel@ischool.berkeley.edu> wrote:

Hello all,

It has taken me a while to respond to the paper, and I'll take the provided excuse of the World Cup.

First, I'll just add my applause to Cool for presenting a fascinating paper and for undertaking such an extensive ethnography. It's also exciting to see more work being done that presents a detailed history of the practices that helped form the material and ideological bases for the web.

Second, like Fran I won't say anything more about the disconnect in the online and on-ground practices. I thought that point was made reasonably well with some of the discussion of Space Bar (particularly the image I had when you described participants asleep with their logins for Space Bar "awake.") As others have already said, more would help. But, I found the diagrams you provided quite helpful and interesting. From my perspective, they do not cut against the analysis (as Jenny seemed to think upon her re-assessment). That being said, the diagram she pointed us to with the themes and the timeline ("Cyberorganic History and Evolution") is incredibly useful and also has an aesthetic quality that is quite evocative. If that can be included somehow, it might go a long way in helping enhance this section.

I'll turn for a second to the discussion of the posthuman. I have some exposure to the cyborg literature, but came into the paper knowing very little about the term "posthuman." I approached it skeptically, but by the time I finished the paper I felt I had learned a lot about the word and its various uses and where Cool stood on it. I needed this to be telegraphed a bit for me at the beginning. I felt lost in the introduction when posthuman came up (perhaps because I'm not an anthropologist). I think it would take one or two sentences just to say something about it up front rather than just leave the term hanging out there with a hint towards its contested nature. This will make the core theoretical point of the paper much more accessible.

Thinking about this has made me wonder to what extent participants in the project took up the

topic of being "cyborgs" or technology-enhanced humans. It strikes me that given the location of the research, the history of online communication that preceded the work, this history's relationship to "new communalism" (Turner 2006), the importance of certain strands of science fiction in shaping this rhetoric, and the particular people involved in the study (including those who the author might have worked with at Institute for the Future), discussions of being a cyborg, or something like "posthuman," might have come up and helped shape the activity. It also seems likely that it is exactly this kind of activity that made people very excited for a while about the possibilities of being posthuman. Perhaps this is what the paper was getting at, but if so, I didn't come through for me.

Finally, as a personal point of interest, I was intrigued by one little theme that came up on that Cyberorganic History and Evolution right under 1995: "Community v. Company." I plan to be writing about this as a part of my dissertation because of the incredibly tension just this discourse seems to put on many of the participants in my study. I learned quite recently from Adrian Johns' history of the term "Piracy" (Piracy 2009), that Rheingold warned about this as a threat to notions of virtual community way back in early conversations (see Chapter 16). I would love to see how participants in this study thought about this given its importance in my research. Jenny, if there is a particular section in your dissertation where you cover this, can you point it out? That would be really helpful to me.

It also might be helpful in making one of your own points in this paper concerning the history of "Web 2.0" which others have already pointed to. This tension might be among the more important issues in your research that prefigures contemporary debates (e.g. Facebook's privacy woes, monetizing "user generated content"), as much as the forms of sociality you describe.

Thanks to all for the thought-provoking material. I am looking forward to reading the dissertation.

Dan

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On Tue, Jun 29, 2010 at 9:01 AM, **David Hakken** <[dhakken@indiana.edu](mailto:dhakken@indiana.edu)> wrote:

*On Jun 29, 2010, at 11:47 AM, Dan Perkel wrote:*

*Hello all,*

*...*

*Thinking about this has made me wonder to what extent participants in the project took up the topic of being "cyborgs" or technology-enhanced humans.*

If one accepts this (to me, reasonable) definition of "cyborg," then we humans have always been cyborgs (as I argued in my *Cyborgs@Cyberspace?*, Routledge (1999)). Hence, to talk about computer-using entities as "post human" is unnecessary and confusing.

DH

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On Tue, Jun 29, 2010 at 3:12 PM, Dan Perkel <dperkel@ischool.berkeley.edu> wrote:

*On Tue, Jun 29, 2010 at 9:01 AM, David Hakken <dhakken@indiana.edu> wrote:*

On Jun 29, 2010, at 11:47 AM, Dan Perkel wrote:

Hello all,

...

Thinking about this has made me wonder to what extent participants in the project took up the topic of being "cyborgs" or technology-enhanced humans.

*If one accepts this (to me, reasonable) definition of "cyborg," then we humans have always been cyborgs (as I argued in my *Cyborgs@Cyberspace?*, Routledge (1999)). Hence, to talk about computer-using entities as "post human" is unnecessary and confusing.*

That may or may not be true, but I guess I was specifically wondering if participants in the study used this language or implied similar concepts with other language. It wouldn't be that unusual in the 1990s Bay Area technology crowd, at least in my experience with it.

Regards,

Dan

On Wed, Jun 30, 2010 at 1:47 PM, **Jenny Cool** <thejennycool@gmail.com> wrote:

What an enlightening, enlivening discussion with valuable cites and insights for questions,

theoretical and practical, in relation to which ethnographic cases, fieldsites, or subjects—of any kind—ought to be situated.

Could the papers noted be shared via the Medianthro site, John? I'd be interested to read and, with these helpful posts from Elisenda, Don, Pablo, Sarah, and Dan, use to better situate and theorize the terms deployed in my Cyborganic paper. Obviously, the discussion extends far beyond that study, but I wanted to respond to three critiques/questions that have been raised.

- (1) The question of siting, defining or bounding a fieldsite. Have I assumed the context that contains the object to which I refer as “the Cyborganic community?”
- (2) Why focus on the business community on the Internet? (Genevieve's question from the thread with subject line “Over to the Presenter”).
- (3) What has all this Cyborganic material to do with that dreadful word “posthuman,” a word that, all things being equal, I think most anthropologists would probably prefer to live without.

Some answers...

(1) Community was not only an emic term it was a cultural key term that I studied, though that's not apparent in the paper. I moved to San Francisco in 1993 specifically to investigate the palpable Zeitgeist of enthusiasm for the socially transformative power of the Net I'd encountered there among “Net Ravers” and “multimedia types.” It seemed everyone was talking about the community building powers of the Internet. Howard Rheingold's *Virtual Community* (about *The WELL*) had just come out. Many in the scene were on *The WELL* and one of the ideas of Cyborganic was to create something like it but for a younger crowd. Again and again in my fieldwork, informants pointed me to Ray Oldenburg's 1989 book, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community*. Oldenburg decries suburbanization for the loss of “third places,” venues that are neither work nor home. This reference connects at once to the “back to the City” aspects of Cyborganic's milieu and to techno-utopian imaginaries of using the Net to create new third places.

Community is what these natives thought they were up to. But emic use is, of course, no justification for automatically adopting a term in etic use. Though it's left out of the paper, I gave a good deal of thought to figuring out what noun to use for Cyborganic.

I considered “network,” and “networked localities” (Ito 1999), and thought about how Castells writes of Internet culture as the “culture of the creators of the Internet” (2001:37). While the subjects of my ethnography were producer/users whose social construction of new media technologies shaped the contemporary web in the U.S.--heirs and adopters of the culture to which Castells refers--I wasn't keen to talk in terms of culture. Cyborganics were, if anything, part of a subculture or rather its members were simultaneously part of a number of interacting social forms that they and the people who study social forms might speak of as subcultures, groups, or communities. The cultural history of formation of this subculture, and its dominant narrative of social revolution through technology, were the focus of my ethnography.

Though I settled on the ordinary language of “community,” \*practices\* and \*imaginaries\* were what I thought I was up to. Yet, the construction of our objects doesn’t stop with choosing nouns. It gets into even the most mundane descriptive work, such as representing an object’s size. If Cyborganic was a community, how big was it? I would have to interpret what counted as membership just to count. Should I go by total number of user accounts on the servers? But not all accounts map to people (some map to roles). Should I include only people with Cyborganic homepages? Or everyone on the cc mailing list? What about the weekly dinners? No single social form was definitive.

In addition spanning social forms, Cyborganic also spanned different localities and had a small New York City contingent. Yet, I do not write much about that group. Cutting them out for simplicity’s sake (or so I said), certainly privileges the place-based social form.

I suppose what I need to clarify in using the heuristic of onground/online, is that it does not map to the binary of material and informational. On both sides of the onground/online dichotomy are phenomena that have a material body, a physical substrate in which they are instantiated, as well as a symbolic, imaginary, or informational dimension. My conception of “collocation” was meant to convey this, but clearly it needs work and I should consider how to do without it.

Bounding the object of my ethnography in TIME was just as slippery as all the other kinds of siting. I devote a whole chapter of my ethnography to a cultural history of networked computing in the Bay Area (1910s-1980s) to show that Cyborganic and its particular cultural milieu did not spring sui generis from the http protocol or Mosaic browser. But figuring out where to end the account was also problematic.

Cyborganic faded away very productively, branching and breaking into spores of different kinds. The fluidity of membership, norms, and forms, not only made it unclear (a judgment call) where to end my account. It also meant I had to decide whether to write about the group in the past or present tense. Cyborganic’s server and the geographically distributed bandwidth collective it supported continued through the writing of my ethnography. But only after the machine went down (April 2008) and participants decided it was no longer economically practical to “run their own box” (with hosting a commercial commodity), was I fully comfortable speaking of it in the past tense.

Those are my comments on bounding. Questions/critiques (2) and (3) I’ll try to deal with more succinctly as I can in the next day or so. I think the above suggests something, but I will try to speak more directly to these good, fair questions that several have posed before the eSeminar ends.

Cheers, Jenny

On Thu, Jul 1, 2010 at 4:25 AM, **Postill, John** <J.Postill@shu.ac.uk> wrote:

*Jenny wrote:*

*"Could the papers noted be shared via the Medianthro site, John? I'd be interested to read and, with these helpful posts from Elisenda, Don, Pablo, Sarah, and Dan, use to better situate and theorize the terms deployed in my Cyborganic paper. "*

Yes, that's a very good idea. I'll be happy to gather all relevant papers/texts off-list and we'll try and make them available on the site.

Meanwhile, a reminder that the seminar closes this coming \*Tuesday at 21:00 GMT\* so please don't delay sending your brief comments and follow-ups!

John

On Thu, Jul 1, 2010 at 7:07 AM, **Daniel Taghioff** <danieltaghioff@yahoo.com> wrote:

Just to follow up briefly on one point:

Actor Network Theory. I like ANT precisely because it locates human agency in a grounded and material distributed yet embodied way, that reconciles a sense of chains of events with a sense of how entities become constituted.

However there is a bit of a gap here. The technology focus in ANT seems to overlook somewhat the social aggregates that are not like technology, that cannot be picked up and put down so easily, as they are to some degree, and in different kinds of ways, a part of who people are.

I think this consideration also calls back into being the sense of communities as united in existential rather than purely material terms, recalling some of what remains of value in Levi Strauss's version of structuralism.

This is not something diverced from technology, or practice, far from it, and the communities of practice literature goes some way to look at the processes of becoming that are implied by joining in with and being joined by certain sets of social practices. I like Wenger's initial thesis since it crosses over from algorithmic ideas of artificial intelligence and learning to the metaphor of neural networks and thus the possibility of not so context-free, (i.e. social) grammars of learning.

Note the play on the idea of transparency in practice in this.

Wenger E. Towards a theory of cultural transparency: elements of a social discourse on the visible and invisible (1991).

That Cyborganic was an effective center for technological and personal becoming through the narrative and relational (as well as technological) form it let people enter into makes this an interesting point. This may lend a twist to the idea of "post-human" or never having been human.

Daniel

Daniel Taghioff

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2010/7/1 Àngels Trias i Valls <Triasiva@regents.ac.uk>

Hi All,

My comments may appear out of place, or a very tangential angle, I do it here to slant our perspective a little... I have read all the post with great interest and I am enjoying them greatly...I have also done a brief reading (I hope to do it more in depth) of the thesis chapters.

I was wondering two things (I will put them in two separate emails)

One, to consider different perspectives to the 'relational nature' that constitute practices to do with media technology ad analytic language. One such perspective(this is what may appear out of place, I am aware!) looks at the cultural perspectives in Japan to do with technologies and what they call 'robot cultures'. What I mean here is to try to put our discussion 'outside' the narratives of the internet/community discourse (something that Jenny does in the introduction, both bringing perspective and proposing a shift -the cyborganic as such-) but maybe it can be done a bit further?

What I want to bring to the discussion is that from the 'new robots' theories perspective, these are being defined as new social technologies (sociable machines).

The concept of sociable machines is useful to me because I find 'social media' and 'social networks' not that useful terms. They emphasise on the abstract quality of the 'social' rather than on the sociability of technology itself. I find it easier and less dichotomous to think of sociable electronic media rather than 'social media'. So I wonder if these terms from 'outside' the internet/community discourse, but equally related to cyborlives could be useful to us...

I understand the discussion about the 'cybororganic' does not include robots! what I am saying here is that it may be useful to consider the cyberorganic as part of a larger understanding of -I borrow the term- 'sociable machines' (Turkle 2006) and sociable electronic media. It is just an attempt to move beyond the offline/real/online...

I am not voting for 'sociable machines' (a term equally controversial) to substitute any of the terms here, but rather as a possibility for expanding descriptions of our media technologies. For me, media technologies amplify what I see as 'shifting points of relatedness' amongst users of these different media technologies (I think Jenny you talk about the interconnected points and gaps that illustrate these). In a sense, what I see in the cyborganic you describe is a place that defines, like many other definitions of the net since early 90s, the shifting nodes, the shifting

points of encounter where relatedness may occur. Am I interpreting you ok?

It doesn't matter to me if that relatedness occurs between humans-cyborgs-robots or in facebook; online or offline; All these being constituted differently, what I find interesting is that the cyborganic, and so the many types of sociable machines are not necessarily about the post-human (equally, you could use Altermodern ideas and call them alter-human) or other post-pre-alter human divides..but what Turkle calls 'human vulnerability'. In chapters 5,6 and overview in 7 there are many rich descriptions of people coming together, offering support, talking about sustainability, feelings of exploitation...As I said, I don't want to substitute one idea for another, simply I find the online/offline is too analytical approach we have borrowed for many years and doesn't always do justice to the ethnographic richness of it all.

I wonder if it would be useful to think about the idea that sociable electronic media, like sociable machines, they all deal with relationships of vulnerability, amongst others (I would not want to reduce it to vulnerability only, it could be for instance, relationships of uncertainty, any really, any relationships of 'states of being' rather than 'in/off places'. Of course I am biased because I find 'states' and emotions conducive to understanding human relatedness); this may help is in taking Sarah's point forward, in then addressing the issue of spatial theories (sociable machines like robots lend themselves to it quite nicely) which may help us move beyond the 'real'/'online'/'offline'/'robot'/'human' divide; as well as emotion, or states of being theories. When we are online and offline, we are on a state of being online and offline, we are not merely 'online' or in a community, as a space, point, but a node of 'being' that participates of those locations, that is why people can converse in facebook, right? And for me it brings us back to Jenny's point of calling it the cyborganic, not just as the name for a community, but also as an analytical term that define those relations. Maybe the term cyborganic could be extended in its analytical capacity more in chapter 7?

PD:I don't want to distinguish sociable machines and sociable electronic media (I purposely use these terms because I prefer the use of 'sociable' electronic media rather than 'social' networks or 'social media') too sharply because I feel the online/real/posthuman takes us to a place we have visited many times in the past and may not resolve our queries that well.

Thank you for the paper and the discussion!!

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 11:18 AM, **Jenny Cool** <thejennycool@gmail.com> wrote:

Thanks Àngels for those fascinating connections, and thanks Dan, Daniel, and Fran, left out of my earlier thank yous, for the encouraging remarks and new insight. To continue with the questions framed in my last post...

(2) Why focus on the business community on the Internet?

I love the way Geneviève posed this question for the embodied sense she gives of her “discomfort” with the subject of business and the “focus on the ways to generate profits.”

First, my research in no way focuses on how to generate profits. As a start up business, Cyborganic was a losing enterprise, even though dozens earned their keep through it over the years, and scores more became skilled and experienced in ways that increased their earning power and options.

To start in a more realist vein (à la Pablo's note on realism/idealism), the business project was vital to Cyborganic's formation. Yet most members of what I've called the "community," even those who lived on Ramona Ave., had no relationship with the business as paid labor, nor as paying customers. I found Cyborganic's business and communitarian practices and imaginaries as inseparable as its onground and online dimensions. (Yes, we've established those as problematic terms, for which I'm grateful). Business was key, but Cyborganic was as much about making a life as about making a living.

Moving to the realm of ideas and representations...

In order to write about Cyborganic, I distinguished the business project from what I call the "project for life." The latter does not coincide with the object labeled "community" that was mutually co-constructed through both projects.

As already noted, I was fascinated by the cultural narrative of social revolution through technology expressed in the imaginaries and practices of my informants. Imaginaries of the "garage start-up" (from Hewlett Packard to Apple and Google) and tales of Silicon Valley's heroic hacker entrepreneurs were thoroughly enmeshed with those of building a community, not only for themselves, but also as an exemplar, a beacon that would demonstrate the socially transformative power of networked personal computing to the wider world. Both "demo" models—the business start-up and the exemplary community—were "bootstrapped" with volunteer labor and personal resources.

From John Winthrop's Puritan "city upon a hill" (1630), to the intentional communities of the 18th and 19th centuries—both religious (Shakers, Rappites, Moravians, Hutterites, the Oneida community) and secular (New Harmony, Brook Farm, Fruitlands, Skaneateles, Nashoba)—the U.S. has a long history of utopian experiments and intentional communities. As Arthur Bestor (1950) and Langdon Winner (1986) have argued, technical invention and social innovation were deeply entwined in many of these in "what Bestor calls 'patent office models' of the good life." (Winner 1986: 61-84). Fred Turner's work on the "New Communalists" (2005, 2007) echoes Bestor and Winner and he describes the Whole Earth Catalog and The WELL as "network forums" "within which information exchange, community building, and economic activity took place simultaneously" (Turner 2005:491). This particular complex, which I see/represent as alive in the narratives and practices of Cyborganic, was my object of inquiry. A key objective in my ethnography was to interrogate the relation between entrepreneurial and utopian in the Cyborganic project, identifying not only their mutuality, but also their tensions, paradoxes, and gaps. So, that is the fundamental idea that informs my engagement with business and the literature on Silicon Valley as a milieu of technological innovation and economic growth.

On to (3) and the posthuman that has been looming over me as the issue that has been very productively discussed in this seminar, but on which I've been silent.

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On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 5:39 PM, **Genevieve Perreault** <gperreault8@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Jenny,

I want to thank you Jenny for your time and your generosity in the way you gave us answers to our questions/critiques.

Understand how a topic takes place in an anthropological view seems very important for me. Your share about your own work, in this seminar occasion, learn to me some, maybe a lot, of the underground thoughts by what gave you reasons to choose this topics.

I know, I know, the seminar is close... :) «A key objective in my ethnography was to interrogate the relation between entrepreneurial and utopian in the Cyborganic project, identifying not only their mutuality, but also their tensions, paradoxes, and gaps. So, that is the fundamental idea that informs my engagement with business and the literature on Silicon Valley as a milieu of technological innovation and economic growth.» said Jenny.

I understand that my formulation about «ways to generate profits » is bad. How technological innovation and economics growth are separate from the idea of generate profits? Isn't it the wish to make profits - a crucial place for tensions, paradoxes, gaps?

And also, «Business was key, but Cyborganic was as much about making a life as about making a living.» said Jenny.

It makes me think about the book «Temps des crises» of Michel Serres (2009). He said : «Après

le monde et le corps, nos relations. Lesdites nouvelles technologies changent nos liens, nos voisinages, nos savoirs et nos manières d'en prendre connaissances. Le connectif remplace le collectif.» [...] «Les sciences parlent du monde et les sociétés des sociétés.» (dialectic relation, one relation between two) [...] «Le nouveau triangle se nomme Science-Société-Biogée. [...] Voilà donc trois relations et non pas une seule ; voilà un surface triangulaire et non une ligne unique.» I think, I feel, that to be cyborganic, we can't separate ways to make life and ways to make living, first in our organic life...

Thanks again for this seminar!

Cheers

Genevieve

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Geneviève Perreault

Étudiante en anthropologie, Université de Montréal

«Le temps n'est pas un obstacle mais un moyen qui permet la réalisation du possible.»

On Fri, Jul 2, 2010 at 8:43 PM, **Jenny Cool** <thejennycool@gmail.com> wrote:

Continuing with the last of questions outlined earlier. Responses are divided to make the text easier to skim.

(3) What has Cyborganic to do with the posthuman? Aren't "cyborg" and cyborg theory sufficient to the tasks of interpreting contemporary social phenomena?

The term "posthuman" appears nowhere in my dissertation on Cyborganic, but came into the picture while writing this paper for last year's AAA meetings for a session called "Human No More" (<http://blog.aaanet.org/2010/05/13/annual-meeting-video-human-no-more/>). The session posed questions of "how the practice of virtual ethnography in cyber worlds undermines traditional anthropological conceptions of place based ethnography while simultaneously challenging the notion of the anthropological 'subject'".

I felt my Cyborganic fieldwork could speak to these questions. I wanted to argue that mediating technologies—specifically, the decoupling of spatial and social presence they afford—do not necessarily dematerialize place, identity, and embodiment as traditional sources of anthropological insight and sites for the production of locality and cultural difference. But I wasn't arguing for a return to place based ethnography of bounded "peoples and cultures" (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:2). Instead, I felt Cyborganic illustrated ways in which the decoupling of spatial and social opened new possibilities for their recombination and reconfiguration,

While I recognized the term "posthuman" was confusing, problematic, and not anthropologist-friendly, I felt Katherine Hayles' arguments offered a framework for conceptualizing a de-centered, intermediated, human subject for whom embodiment and place remain defining

sources of identity and cultural difference. In working to puzzle through my thoughts on the “posthuman,” I had noticed something interesting in Tom Boellstroff’s *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2009). There he rejects the term “posthuman” as “misleading,” writing: “The notion of the posthuman conflates the human with the subject of liberal humanism, and thus with disciplinary debates in the humanities.” (Boellstroff: 29). Yet, in the sentence prior, he quotes Hayles words to express his own aims, writing: “I wish to ‘contest what the posthuman means... before the trains of thought it embodies have been laid down so firmly that it would take dynamite to change them’” (Hayles in Boellstroff 2008:29),

Boellstorff develops the idea of “virtually human” throughout his book, arguing: “although some insightful research has claimed that online culture heralds the arrival of the ‘posthuman,’ I show that *Second Life* culture is profoundly human...our ‘real’ lives have been ‘virtual’ all along, It is in being virtual that we are human...human being has always been virtual being.” (Boellstorff 2008: 5)

While I understand he proposes “virtually human” as more theoretically productive than “posthuman,” I thought it unfortunate to close out Hayles’ vision of the “posthuman,” particularly in light of this recurring pattern—

“we have always been posthuman” (Hayles 1999: 291)

“we have always been cyborgs (Hakken: 1999, and on this thread)

“we have always been virtual” (Boellstroff 2008).

To speak to Dan Perkel’s question, it’s not so much that *Cyborganic*’s participants took up the idea of “being cyborgs or technology-enhanced humans.” Though these ideas were certainly present in the geek cultural milieu, which intersects wider science fiction and cyber-punk subcultures, “*Cyborganic*,” as name and concept, was most often explained as a blend of “cyber” and “organic,” or encompassing “both sides of the screen,” rather than in terms of being “cyborg” or cyborganic.

In connection with the two most recent posts from Àngels Trias I Valls, I want to note that *Cyborganic*’s founder, Jonathan Steuer, wrote an article (with Nass and Tauber) titled “Computers Are Social Actors” (1994), The abstract speaks to his view of human-computer interaction and, I think, to points Àngels raises.

“Five experiments provide evidence that individuals’ interactions with computers are fundamentally social. The studies show that social responses to computers are not the result of conscious beliefs that computers are human or human-like. Moreover, such behaviors do not result from users’ ignorance or from psychological or social dysfunctions, nor from a belief that subjects are interacting with programmers. Rather, social responses to computers are commonplace and easy to generate.

(Nass, Steuer, Tauber: 1994)

<http://www.vhml.org/theses/wijayat/sources/writings/papers/p72-nass.pdf>

Finally, I believe the “teleology of disembodiment” traced in Hayles’ account of the “posthuman” pertains to *Cyborganic* as a “project for life.” I analyze *Cyborganic* as a cultural

commune, a “local utopia” addressed to the transformations of network society, a project to resist “the individualization of identity attached to life in the global networks of power and wealth” (Castells 1997:61, 65). Clearly, this line of analysis draws on Castells theorization of “the space of flows” and “space of places,” which others here have referenced, but to be specific: “the space of flows . . . links up distant locales around shared functions and meanings on the basis of electronic circuits and fast transportation corridors, while isolating and subduing the logic of experience embodied in the space of places” (Castells 2001:155-78)

Like the “teleology of disembodiment” Hayles identifies, Castells “space of flows” is also characterized as a threat to embodied experience. In my longer account, not in the paper presented, I examine the challenges of yoking the pace of daily life to the product development cycles of technology-intensive industries.

Many researchers have observed that high-technology product-cycles and work practices compress temporal experience (e.g. Barley 1988; Harvey 1990). In this context, the logic of work spills over into other realms; “life is colonized by work and technology...boundaries between home and work blur; and the self becomes another project to be streamlined” (Davidson 2004:187). My analysis here draws on Jan English-Lueck excellent ethnography *cultures@siliconvalley* (2002) particularly her chapter “Compressing: Using Digital Devices to Shape Space and Time,” where she writes: “Everyday life in Silicon Valley becomes transformed into a series of projects, and the underlying logic of outsourcing extends beyond the workplace into family and civic life.” (English-Lueck 2002: 58)

I found the theme of compressing, of the logic of work compressing the experience of space and time particularly salient to Cyborganic. Cyborganic was a project for life in a social order dominated by work. This, I argue, was the basic paradox (and limit) of its entrepreneurial-utopian vision. This excerpt from a longtime Cyborganic give, a sense of what I mean.

"It was crazy—so much money floating around and so many amazing projects outside of industry...I hear SOMA is a ghost town now...I don't miss the insane pre-launch phase of so many start-ups. The summer I built tibet.org I also was contracting well over 40 hours a week at E!Online to get that off the ground and also had a side gig working for a VRML browser company, not to mention the Cyborganic education stuff. I think I worked 16 hours a day 6-7 days a week for two months, not to mention living in Oakland and taking BART back and forth. You can only do that kind of thing for so long before your mind and health fail. (Dan Haig, questionnaire response, September 15, 2004)

Here the teleology of disembodiment is felt in pushing against the physical limits of time, space, the human body. It is re-inscribed through entrepreneurial imaginaries of dematerialized labor, and practices of “always on” connectivity and productivity.

60-hour work weeks were not uncommon for Cyborganic's members during the “dotcom boom” (~1995-2000). One informant used to joke, “I'm self-employed which means I can work any 80 hours a week I want.” (Ian McFarland). This pace of life and time-space compression--along with the collocation and presence casting discussed in the paper--were key ways in which spatial and social relations were reconfigured in Cyborganic without being disembodied or

dematerialized.

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On Sun, Jul 4, 2010 at 7:21 AM, **Antoni Roig Telo** <aroigt@uoc.edu> wrote:

Hi again,

As John has already reminded us, we are heading to the final stages of this seminar, and using Dan Perkel's words, there's no better way to summarize what we have been experiencing so far than in terms of 'thought- provoking material'... Indeed it is!!! I can only thank Jenny's insights on each of the many topics arised, be it derived from the paper or from the whole of the Cyborganic case. Thanks extended from the wonderful messages from all the participants. We have needed some time to set the discussion off, but it was definetely worth the wait.

There have been so many highlights so far that it would be really unfair to single out any of them. I've been busily taking notes ranging from the limits of the 'forms of communication' approach and its misrepresentation of mutual constitution, the emphasis on utopian narratives and sequence of events, the approach to the fieldsite as a network (from 'site' to 'siting' seemed to me particularly exciting), the redefinition and interconnection of different spaces in the attempt to surpass the offline/ online dichotomy, the differentiation between the notions of 'community'and 'company' (distinction frequently ignored in Spanish language), the link to theories on communities of practice, the reconsideration of 'social media technologies' as sociable electronic media and the notion of 'node of being' instead 'state of being'... Just to name a few.

Fortunately for all of us, Jenny has been extremely responsive and involved in collecting and taking into account all the different subjects which have been coming out through the, showing us the impressive scope of her work and bringing up new and stimulating suggestions.

Drawing from Jenny's latest messages, I'd like to reproduce to paragraphs I've found particularly enlightening:

*To start in a more realist vein (à la Pablo's note on realism/idealism), the business project was vital to Cyborganic's formation. Yet most members of what I've called the "community" even those who lived on Ramona Ave., had no relationship with the business as paid labor, nor as paying customers. I found Cyborganic's business and communitarian practices and imaginaries as inseparable as its onground and online dimensions. (Yes, we've established those as problematic terms, for which I'm grateful). Business was key, but Cyborganic was as much about making a life as about making a living.*

(2/6/2010)

*Cyborganic was a project for life in a social order dominated by work. This, I argue, was the basic paradox (and limit) of its entrepreneurial-utopian vision [...] This pace of life and time-space compression--along with the collocation and presence casting discussed in the paper-- were key ways in which spatial and social relations were reconfigured in Cyborganic without being disembodied or dematerialized.*

(3/6/2010)

I feel particularly compelled by this paradox of Cyborganic being seen as "a project for life in a social order dominated by work", or, quoting the first paragraph being as much "about making a life as about making a living". The implications of -again in Jenny's words- the conversion of everyday life turned into a project and compression of temporal-spatial experience are enormous, particularly related to contemporary research on creative labour (which of course involves also academic labour!). I'd love to know what the participants think about how these paradoxes are taking shape in contemporary discourses on creative labour relations and the everyday.

Thank you and keep posting in the few days we have left!!

On Mon, Jul 5, 2010 at 2:57 AM, **MAI Saptенno** <mai\_saptenno@yahoo.com> wrote:

Dear Jenny

Thank you for a stimulating paper and thoughtful arguments. I've found so many engaging ideas from the discussions.

Just one question, though. With the online and offline boundedness of which the body is attached to information pattern, how is the effect of the evolving sense of authentic social interaction functions as critique to the imaginaries and other spatial formations?

Inez Saptенno  
Masterstudent University of Indonesia

On Mon, Jul 5, 2010 at 10:52 AM, **Jenny Cool** <thejennycool@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Inez,

Thank you for your email. Glad to hear you've found the seminar engaging. Are you asking: (a) How effective was Cyborganic as a critique? How effectively did the "project for life" challenge the "social order dominated by work?"

Or, (b) Do you mean: how did I read Cyborganic as a critique of other imaginaries and spatial formations? What was critical about its social form, imaginaries, practices?

If, (a), I address this question in chapter 7 of the dissertaton, "Cyborganic and Social Change: The Power and Limits of Community" (cool.org/chapterguide)

There I describe Cyborganic as a creative project of resistance, rather than a critique, because it challenged certain effects of that dominant order, but *\*not\** their premises. For example, Cyborganics' imaginaries and practices of user-generated media countered conventions of top-down publishing, but adopted the same mass-media model of advertising-supported "content." In Cyborganic, as in geek culture generally, even those practices and imaginaries that challenge

mainstream norms are often justified in terms of dominant values. The renaming, or “re-branding” of free software as “open source” that took place in the 1990s provides a visible example of this pattern.

Though my own critique was to show this central paradox (and limit) in Cyborganics' own imaginaries, and practices, I do not assess either the community or business projects in terms of success/failure, or authenticity/falsity. This and the Mark Poster quote that Don Slater referenced earlier put me in mind of Benedict Anderson's lines:

“all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.” (1991: 6)

The heuristic distinction Anderson makes (and parenthetically unmakes) between face-to-face and imagined points to problems with the onground/online dichotomy. Both onground and online life are equally imagined, but “onground” is effectively a synonym for “face-to-face contact.” The two dichotomies are not isomorphic, but they both take face-to-face as a reference point (an imaginary of unmediated contact). Things get even more confusing when “virtual” is used as a synonym for Anderson's “imagined.”

If your question was (b), then my answer below also responds to Angels' questioning of “the lack” in my description of Cyborganic as: “a project...to create the kind of face-to-face community its leaders, members, and social critics alike (e.g. Kunstler 1993; Putnam 2001) found lacking in contemporary American society.” (page 4 of the dissertation)

This claim is based on the discourse (noted earlier) about virtual/online community as a way to bring back “third places” of informal, public, sociality that suburbanization had sapped from American life. This was as prominent in Cyborganic's founding documents and publications, as in interviews and email responses from the wider membership.

“Suburbia” –and all the associated “lacks” of this “style of life” that this imaginary conjured for my informants—was the key touchstone \*against\* which most everyone framed their participation. Everyone interviewed from 1994-2004 made some explicit reference to working to make a life that wasn't \*that\*. For example:

“So monogamy didn't work at all for our parents, obviously, right. That's interesting, what can we play with there? How can we make that, how can tug on that? The idea of not having a community that is close to you physically, that didn't work so good, how can we change that?” (James Home, Interview 9/24/2004)

I hope that gets at the questions you were asking.

Cheers, Jenny

Reference:

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin*

and Spread of Nationalism. Revised Edition ed. London and New York: Verso, 1991.

On Tue, Jul 6, 2010 at 2:24 PM, **Postill, John** <J.Postill@shu.ac.uk> wrote:

Dear All

Our session devoted to Jenny Cool's working paper "The mutual co-construction of online and onground in Cyborganic" has come to an end. I wish to thank Jenny for sharing her work with us and for responding to quite a range of different questions, our discussant Antoni Roig Telo, and all those of you who've contributed to the conversation.

As always, we'd like to put a PDF of the seminar on our site and would be grateful for a volunteer who could turn the archived e-seminar into a Word doc or PDF - quite a straightforward task (see existing PDFs on the site). Please drop me a line offlist if you can help with this and I'll explain how it works.

Our next e-seminar will take place sometime after the summer break, probably towards the end of September. If you wish to present a working paper this coming academic year or would like to suggest a suitable presenter, please let me know as soon as possible as we already have a number of sessions lined up.

Also, a reminder that the Media Anthropology Network panel, The Rewards of Media, will take place during the EASA conference at Maynooth (Ireland) on Wed 25 August at 11:30, room to be allocated, see <http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2010/panels.php5?PanelID=648>

And let's not forget our cousins over at the digital anthropology panel, starting the following day, Thurs 26 August, at 11:30, <http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easa/easa2010/panels.php5?PanelID=599>

Then in the evening we have the Network's general meeting, Thurs 26 August 19:30-21:00 (no room yet)

Hoping to see many of you in Ireland!

John

On Wed, Jul 7, 2010 at 12:07 AM, **Antoni Roig Telo** <aroigt@uoc.edu> wrote:

Dear friends,

I'd like to thank all the participants for this wonderful experience, particularly to John, for making it possible and Jenny, for making it so enjoyable and inspiring. It's been a pleasure!

Toni Roig

<http://uoc.academia.edu/AntoniRoigTelo/>