Becoming Together and Apart
Technoemotions and other posthuman entanglements

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Abstract

Social media has in its relatively short existence become a natural arena for people of all generations to inhabit and live significant parts of their life. People of all ages are forming personal strategies for their social media presence and absence and most of us are using internet not only for information and services but also as social arenas for sharing experiences of fun and joy, communication and friend making. What we share and not in social media is slowly changing and it seems like there is a slow shift in the norms surrounding what we share and not. This thesis is focusing on the extreme norm-breaking online sharing by entering material of a kind that most people never encounter (suicide, self-harm, mental illness).

Using social media and norm-breaking material as an empirical touchstone this thesis elaborates, investigates and explores the entangled relationships between humans and technology in social media settings. Guided by uncomfortable, emotional and bodily online sharing the thesis gives voice to stories that are seldom heard, by people whose lives are rarely spoken of. By exploring the performative entanglements of/with/through technology, design and human intent the overall aim is to offer a critical and new understanding of our online togetherness and posthuman becoming.

The conceptual framework throughout the thesis is based on posthuman theory and feminist technoscience, two closely connected theories providing a new onto-epistemological way of understanding the world’s becoming. The thesis should be seen as the product of an empirical practice of making theory about digital things, culture, humans and non-humans. By exploring diffraction and touch as not
only theoretical standpoints but also hands-on methodology the thesis contributes to the development of new ways of doing research.

Important findings arising from the practice of diffraction and touch are Technoemotions – conceptually agents built on a posthuman understanding of how emotions are entangled between and within the phenomenon, becoming important agents in the apparatus creating the phenomenon. Four Technoemotions seem particularly prominent in the material: Trust, Truth, Time and Embodiment.

The thesis concludes by providing a discussion on critical alternatives for ethics, politics and power in relation to social media and the norms and norm-breaking practices most of us participate in. The responsibility and ability to respond are addressed, as well as social justice and hope for the future to come.
Acknowledgements

There are many people I want to thank for making this thesis possible. First of all, I am deeply grateful to my superb supervisors Erik Stolterman and Anna Croon Fors. Thank you for putting up with me all those years, without you this thesis would not have happened. Erik, you have a strange ability to help me restore my faith in myself when I have lost it along the way. Somehow you always make me feel capable and smart, that is a wonderful gift to give a PhD student. You are truly amazing. Anna, if it was not for you I would be totally lost in academia. It was you who planted the seed of curiosity in me many years ago. Now, it is you who give me direction and hope for a better future. It is you who keeps me sane at the same time as you push and encourage me to balance on the edge of insanity. Together we are Aummmmmmmmm! No - I mean: Awwwwesooooome!

I would like to post a special thanks to the readers of my manuscript at different stages. Christina Mörtberg and Simon Lindgren, thank you for reading and giving me interesting input at my mid-seminar. Andreas Lund, Fatemeh Moradi, Mikael Wiberg and Heather Wiltse, your comments, suggestion and questions during my final seminar have inspired and improved this thesis greatly and I am truly grateful for your commitments and work. There are also some volunteer readers I want to thank, readers that at different stages along the way have provided me with important feedback. I’m thinking of you P-O Ågren, Karin Danielsson-Öberg, Annelie Brännström-Öhman and Katrin Jonsson. Special thanks to Robyn Schimmer for your help with my references.

As a PhD student affiliated both with the Department of Informatics and Umeå Centre for Gender Studies, I have been fortunate to be
part of two stimulating academic environments. At the Department of Informatics I would like to thank all my colleagues for interesting discussions, input and great laughs in the fikarum. In particular I would like to thank Annakarin Nyberg, Andreas Lund, Carl-Johan Orre, P-O Ågren, Fatemeh Moradi, Nosheen Malik, Karin Danielsson Öberg, Agnetha Frick, Taline Jadaan and Ulrika Westergren for friendship, inspiring conversations and for making countless lunches and coffee breaks a pleasure. At UCGS I am especially thankful to Ethel Kauto, Katarina Kärnebro, Elisabeth Olivius, Tove Selander and Magnus Stenius for their friendship, intellectual conversations, support and inspiration during our years as PhD students. Our week in Malta will stay with me forever. At UCGS I would also like to mention the great work by Ann-Louise Silfver and Linda Berg, Hildur Kalman and Annelie Bränström Öhman. Thank you for your committed leadership of the UCGS Graduate School. You rock!

I would like to direct a sincere and warm thank you to all of my colleagues at the Centre for Educational Development (UPL) where I have had my permanent position all those years. Katarina, Maria, Claire, Karl, Jonas, Jörgen, Hans-Erik, Agnetha, Lena, Lena, Mona, Thomas, Per, Niklas, Bengt, Erik and Sara, you always make me feel like I’m welcome even if I have been gone for months sometimes. Thank you for your patience and friendship!

There are some people that make marks on your body, as Barad would put it (2007), people that change you or your path in one way or another. Nea Mellberg, you might not know this but our short conversation about doing research on the dark side of life made a great impact on me and you truly made me a better person that day. Thank you! Annette Markham, the day you spoke of ethics and “fabricated data” I suddenly understood what ethics are in relation to
my material, a very important and a great milestone for me. Thank you! Camilla Granholm, thank you for being a good friend in a sometimes hard academic climate. Perhaps it is time for a reunion of the AoIR Heads soon. I also like to thank my equestrian friends for reminding me about what really matters such as: show jumping, dressage, hay quality, manure texture, and unpaid hard labor.

Last but not least I would like to thank the people closest to my heart; my family. I’m truly sad that my Mother (Maj) and my Father (Jan) are not with me anymore. I think both of you would have been really proud of me today. I love you. I miss you. Luckily I have a whole bunch of siblings: Johan, Erik, Åsa, Per and Charlie who are very precious (as well as your families) and mean the world to me. A summer without räkkväll at Hästhagen is not a summer. I love you all!

And then... my children and my husband. Andreas and Olivia thank you for being who you are. Thank you for putting up with a mum who is almost always working. Thank you for keeping me grounded and thank you for all your love and support. You are my past-present-future and without you life would be nothing. Dimitris, I wrote a few words for you in Greek: Θα ήθελα επίσης να ευχαριστήσω τον σύντροφό μου Δημήτριο. Είμαι παντοτινά ευγνώμων για την συμπαράστασή σου και για το γεγονός ότι μου υπενθυμίζεις αυτά που πραγματικά έχουν σημασία, ειδικά όταν ο φόρτος εργασίας με καταβάλει. Έχω πλήρη συναισθήση του ότι δεν είμαι η ευκολότερη συμβία! Σε ευχαριστώ που είσαι ακόμα δίπλα μου! Σ’αγαπώ τώρα και για πάντα.

Writing this thesis has been like domesticating a hippopotamus, almost too difficult to pull off. But - here I am. After a long journey...
and some hard struggles I have finally arrived at the destination I have been longing for - just to realize that this is just the beginning. Bittersweet as they say.

I’ll end this ranting with my favorite playlist. One might even say it is the theme music for this thesis. Adele, without your music my life would be so much more dull. So. Hello! And thanks!

**Playlist**

*When We Were Young - Adele*  
https://open.spotify.com/track/7ilSoBPWS8ek2P2GaxH3cP

*Someone Like You - Adele*  
https://open.spotify.com/track/6QPKYGnAW9QozVz2dSWqRg

*Make You Feel My Love - Adele*  
https://open.spotify.com/track/0mqTcM8kuu2IYPotMt7AzS

*Skyfall - Adele*  
https://open.spotify.com/track/3mr584ZFSkZrWja9kJAzlb

*Rolling In the Deep - Adele*  
https://open.spotify.com/track/7h8Ud480Fm4ReUVxgFF9ZX

*Tired - Adele*  
https://open.spotify.com/track/3Tq8j1W18svDetcuQb8E
Sociala medier har för många människor blivit en naturlig del av vardagen där den digitala gemenskapen är lika viktig som den analoga. På platser så som Facebook, Twitter, bloggar och Instagram kommunicerar vi genom att dela med oss av tankar, händelse och åsikter i vår vardag. Vi varvar bilder från vår semester med politiska artiklar, delar vidare kloka citat eller resultatet från ett test av något slag, skryter på våra barn, filmar våra husdjur, delar med oss av sjukdomstillstånd och barnafödande och allt annat som en vardag kan vara fyllt av. Just själva delandet är ett viktigt fundament i sociala mediers blivande och dess design är ofta optimerad för att kunna dela samma inlägg till flera olika sociala plattformar med ett enkelt klick.


Avhandlingen avslutas med en metareflektion över hur det är möjligt att skapa kunskap om komplexa posthumanistiska fenomen där mänsklig handlingsförmåga vävs samman med digitala material och dess skilda rationaliteter. Genom att efterfråga alternativa ideal för kunskapsutveckling och design där etik, politik och makt är viktiga inslag hoppas författaren på en kritisk och alternativ förståelse av den verklighetsproduktion som sociala medier (och andra posthumana fenomen) bidrar till.
Act 1 Setting the scene

*It matters what matters we use to think other matters with;*
*it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with;*
*it matters what knots knot knots*
*what thoughts think thoughts,*
*what ties tie ties.*
*It matters what stories make worlds and*
*what worlds make stories.*

*Haraway 2011*
1. Introduction

The story begins

Tuesday the 17th September, 2013, Kristian Gidlund, died leaving thousands of people mourning his death. Most of them only knew Kristian through his blog where he shared, through his writing, his struggle against the cancer that had invaded his body. Kristian was good with words and his posts grabbed hold of his readers as he invited them to be part of his life, death and everything in between. Through his posts he highlighted how precious life can be and his blog soon became one of the most widely read blogs in Sweden in 2013. He moved an entire country out of its comfort zone by presenting live updates from the bed of a dying young man, himself.

So, in this bed I will spend my life, the new life. It will be here I dream of graduations, masquerades and midsummer nights. About summerhouses and tall grass swiping my bare legs. I dream that I discover everything from restaurants to Indians. I dream of a strong life. About all the things that I would do, or not do. I’m so tired of my new nevers. They didn’t have a place in my life before. Things were never impossible then. Now it’s different. Now my bed is my vehicle. Now my body is my cage.

Kristian Gidlund, 12 Aug 2013 [My translation]

Social media

In their relatively short existence social media have become familiar arenas and habitats for people of all generations to spend significant parts of their lives. People of all ages are forming personal strategies for their social media presence or absence, and most of us are using internet not only as a facilitator for accessing information and services, but also as a provider of social arenas for sharing experiences of fun and joy, communication and making friends
(Croon & Nyberg 2002, Nyberg 2008, Skog 2010, Turkle 2012, Markham 2006). We are actively shaping a digital togetherness, a virtual place where we are involved in each other’s everyday lives even though we are not physically present (Croon Fors 2006, Turkle 2012).

As we surf the web, embracing programs and apps designed to support our newfound need for social media we constantly expose more information about ourselves, our worldviews, our political insights and glimpses of our everyday lives. In a sharing mode (as consumers and/or producers) social media seem to be gradually moving unspoken boundaries between what we do and do not share (Van Dijck 2013). Social norms seem to be changing as a collective culture of self-disclosure is growing in social media as we form our digital togetherness via the countless programs, apps, platforms, blogs, wikis, micro blogs and social network sites (SNS) that marks our digital everyday life (Ibid). In this thesis I use the term social media as a collective term for all those diverse digital platforms, places and spaces.

Thus, we increasingly live in an extended world where the digital and non-digital have blurred borders and our togetherness involves a mixture of activities that require digital media and hence have been dubbed posthuman (Hayles 1999, Braidotti 2013, Verbeek 2008). Social media are interwoven with our daily lives and activities, as places we share and encounter ourselves and each other. Everyday happenings, joys and sorrows are shared with our closest family over the dinner table and then (or often before and during) with the world through our extended selves living through our personalized digital devices. A global digital togetherness is felt, experienced and lived.
**Negotiations of social norms**

In gathering material for this thesis I have tuned in to what can be considered as norm-breaking (extreme) sharing and self-disclosure online. I have searched for cases that are often considered evocative and sometimes provocative or “too much” in the public eye. Examples include the masses of young girls representing themselves online with pictures that strongly highlight their bodies. Sharing photos of themselves posing with a deep cleavage, tight pants or short skirts they mirror themselves in our contemporary online society while exploring their sexuality using a normative scale of what does and does not represent femininity, rating themselves through other people’s likes and comments (Ikonomidis Svedmark and Nyberg 2009). Growing numbers of boys and young men have started following this trend, posting selfies\(^1\) on social media, exposing not only their face but also their bodies with an emphasis on oiled skin, muscles and jawlines. The reaction to this kind of exposure has changed during the studies underlying this thesis, as it was regarded as norm-breaking “sexual exposure” 7-8 years ago, but is accepted and within social norms now (Van Dijck 2013). This change indicates that norms are shifting and the phenomenon\(^2\) of norm-breaking online disclosure/sharing should be considered a moving, dynamic phenomenon there is constant negotiation regarding norms, norm-breaking and what is and is not acceptable. The evolution of “selfies” is a good example of how public norms have changed from being strongly questioned by adults (and some youths) to become an everyday accepted practice. Sharing in various ways is a cumulative

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\(^1\) A selfie is a certain kind of self-portrait photograph, typically taken with a hand-held digital camera or

\(^2\) Norm-breaking online sharing can be regarded either as a single phenomenon or myriads of phenomena. For convenience, it is treated in both of these manners at various places in the thesis, as deemed appropriate for the specific context.
practice, and its social acceptance seems to have increased (it has increasingly become a norm) as its frequency has risen.

**Norm-breaking sharing**

Other examples of social norm breaking online include the sharing of strong emotional and personal experiences when dealing with mental illness in various ways. Thousands of people write about grief, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, self-harm and/or mutilation, depression, abuse and self-hate. We also find many stories from people suffering from serious health conditions, such as cancer, dealing less with the actual disease than living (and dying) with it. Suicide seems to be the most controversial topic to share, but still many people openly think, talk and write online about ending their life, and there are many life narratives from survivors or family members who are grieving a loved one who has chosen to die. You can also find people online on a mission to help others to commit suicide by giving them instructions on how to kill themselves most efficiently\(^3\) and of course the opposite, people who spend much time and energy trying to help unknown others to survive another day.

The most extensive forms of online emotional sharing often have a narrative-like character, unfolding sticky (Liljestöm & Paasonen 2010) or uncomfortable stories that most of us would not share with an unknown global audience. Passing visitors of, for example, a blog with such norm-breaking content often stay and leave a comment or two, trying to help bear the burden and suffering expressed by suggesting another course of action, where to find help, or ways to search for alternatives. Serious matters are dealt with, strong

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\(^3\) See for example www.sjalvmord.com, sjalvmord.net and dodshjalp.com (closed in 2011, but all can be found on Pirate Bay).
emotions are exposed, discussed and distilled down to what might be seen as the core questions of life – life itself. At times crucial existential decision-making takes place within a digital space together/through/with technology, and known participants, unknown participants and silent observers as co-actors. At times the audience may turn against the sharer, becoming cold, ironic and/or hateful, creating a hostile atmosphere in order to do harm or expose the narrative as exaggerated or fake.

**Uncomfortable science**

To understand what social media is, does and becomes, sharing must be understood from a transdisciplinary posthuman perspective (more in chapter 2 & 3). Perhaps I could have studied any mundane online sharing anywhere at any time, but as the ancient saying goes, to hear the truth speak to a fool, a drunk or a child, i.e. someone who has not yet learnt or has lost normal inhibitions (or don’t care about norms). Thus, I use norm-breaking sharing as both a touchstone and an indicator of “diffraction patterns” (Barad 2007, see Act 3 for an explanation of this term) in efforts to understand the shifting in norms that we are participating in, but (as with all norms) cannot readily distinguish until they are broken. Being a part of a norm we have little or no possibility to step outside ourselves to study such shifts from a distance. Therefore, I have turned my attention toward the uncomfortable and sometimes very naked forms of online emotional sharing, sharing of photos and words, emotions and responses, life and death. I have focused on gathering material that clearly crosses the unspoken privacy boundaries between what we (at least in western culture) do and do not share in public arenas (such as social media) where anyone can listen, see and participate. Knowledge of the uncomfortable norm-breaking sharing can help us
understand the mechanisms whereby we are all changing in a society that is engaging increasingly deeply in social media with little understanding of the changes involved or their potential implications. The disturbing presence of the norm-breakers touches upon existential matters, they carry important knowledge of how we become together with others, ourselves and technology, forming stories about relations, design, intent and intentionality when creating the digital material we call social media and the content displayed and shared there in.

Drawing on a five-year ethnographic study of norm-breaking emotional online sharing and six-month ethnographic study of online bodily exposure among youth I here present a thesis that advocates a critical understanding of the digital society, an understanding that does not rely solely on mirroring interaction patterns but is also based on perceptions from other senses used to touch and experience the phenomena.

I have used these phenomena like a physicist or anthropologist may consider “limit cases”, as points at which one or more variable is at its most extreme, and thus certain relationships are clearest. Social media and sharing have provided arenas where I have observed and experienced deep associated emotions (touched the phenomena, sensu Barad 2012) and wrestled with questions concerning who and what we are becoming together with technology, through technology and by technology. Further, as we are all responsible for the world we collectively create, live by and through, it is crucial to understand if and how we can and should respond, ethically and morally, to the shifts. This does not mean that we will be able to perceive any kind of ideal, static state, but we may be able to discern some inscribed patterns of our becoming. In this venture, norm-breaking online
sharing has provided empirical keys for both arenas I have explored and posthuman theory-making, which has in turn helped hone my questions, deepen my experience, broaden my touch and seek new keys.

My conceptual framework has been based on theories regarding a new onto-epistemological way of understanding the world's becoming, as discussed in Chapter 4, 13 and 14. In the context of this thesis this should be seen as an empirical practice of making theory about digital things, culture, humans and non-humans. It is rooted in a postmodern philosophy and feminist critique, holding that knowledge can never be disconnected from politics, locations, or the knower(s). Instead it is always situated, located and generated through understanding of its producer(s), with recognition that there is no objective knowledge to find “out there”, only stories to be told by someone, and/or from somewhere (Haraway 1991). By empirically experimenting with the mentioned theories this thesis grasps for new settlements regarding knowledge of our relationship(s) with and through matter and things, focusing on social media as points where humans and technology are strongly intra-acting and evolving.

Leaning on feminist studies in general, and feminist technoscience in particular, the knowledge produced in this thesis will come to life by encountering and touching the phenomena through the empirical material I have experienced and selected in writing this thesis.

The presented material consists of stories intended to allow readers to encounter and experience selected posthuman digital life narratives of norm-breaking material in social media. They are also intended to illustrate the process of embodied knowledge production, involving the interplay of theory, empirical observation and my personal responses as I have offered my self as the playground for the
two to battle on/through. The outcome – the knowledge - can therefore only be absorbed and understood as a mixture of these ingredients⁴, resting on a tradition where science is also a storytelling practice (Haraway 2011, King 2011), and the researcher can never escape from playing an active part in the stories (Grobstein 2005). This does not mean that I have randomly made up the knowledge, rather the opposite, my location within serves as the strength and the guarantor for a knowledge produced by an embodied materialized vision of a world’s becoming (Haraway 1991). Or, to paraphrase, Lykke (2010) in her reading of Haraway; “there is no “outside”, no comfortable distant position, from which the world can be analyzed. On the contrary, the researcher is involved, in compliance with and co-responsible; and knowledge production will always imply a subjective dimension”.

The empirical observations in this thesis provide examples of phenomena linked to several themes and “technoemotions”, discussed in detail in coming chapters, but the primary objective is to extend theoretical understanding of our becoming together with and through each other, including nonhuman components. The examples and theory concern aspects including being in touch with “the stranger within” (Barad, 2010), human and nonhuman, emotions and insights. The matters considered also include research methodology, design, ethics, responsibility and attempts to figure out how to reconfigure the future to make the world a better place. They also concern trust, truth, embodiment and time, as they form posthuman patterns throughout the material, offering insights about possible futures.

⁴The phenomena, the theories and methods + me.
In summary, the thesis is a story of who we are becoming, together and apart, through and with the digital technology that not only surrounds us but at times also defines us: a story of posthuman encounters and futures to come.

**Aim(s) and research questions**

Using social media and norm-breaking material as an empirical touchstone this thesis is set out to elaborate, investigate and explore the entangled relationship(s) between human and technology in social media settings. Guided by uncomfortable, emotional and bodily online sharing this thesis gives voice to stories that are seldom heard, by people whose life are rarely spoken off. By exploring the performative entanglements of/with/through technology, design and human intent the overall aim of this thesis is to offer a critical and different understanding of our online togetherness and posthuman becoming.

Even though this thesis is empirically dense my mission has not been to look at - but through - these some times extreme cases in search for traces of the common and joint mechanisms that together figure and/or re-configure the phenomenon. By looking through I also search for an alternative understanding of research method, research ethics and researchers responsibility to the knowledge produced. I have struggled to stay true to the trouble and messiness a posthuman world has to offer, a world where our phenomena are in constant move and alteration.

Grounded in feminist technoscience and posthuman theory (as outlined above) this thesis addresses three overarching research questions:
• How can we explore posthuman entanglements within social media?

• What are the commonalities within the phenomenon that might illuminate its general becoming as a continuum?

• How do technology and its design affect and communicate within the phenomenon of online sharing?

Disposition

This thesis is divided in four acts. I have called them Acts since they are like scenery playing out different parts of this thesis becoming.

Act One sets the scene, providing background information about the field of social media, related research, my methods and the theory I have relied upon. It has six chapters, summarized as follows:

Chapter 1 (Introduction) provides an introduction to the starting points of the thesis and the questions I attempt to answer. This is a personal chapter, defining my intentions for the work you are reading.

Chapter 2 (Transdisciplinary foundations) provides a brief background to social media research, history, facts and relevant numbers. This chapter also defines sharing as norm, deals with the discourse on public privacy, technology and design.

Chapter 3 (Projects involved) is devoted to a short overview of the projects I have been involved in. All those mentioned are important, in different ways, since they have provided platforms for me to gather important empirical material for this thesis. Simple charts provide overviews of the entire material involved, and the methods I have used to collect and analyze the material in each of the projects.
In Chapter 4 (Perspectives) I take a stand as a modest witness with a feminist agenda. I introduce key elements of quantum physics, material feminism, feminist technoscience and posthumanist theories that have informed my conceptual framework, providing me a different way of considering and *experiencing* both my material and the world at large. I urge you to read this chapter carefully. It is hard to question the way we always has see things before, the way we understand things until today and the way we always have made sense of the world. Be open. Be patient. Be ware. It might do something to you.

Chapter 5 (Digital dirt, Cuts and Choices) is devoted to explaining the selections made for gathering my material, making decisions on what to include and what to exclude. This chapter provides a definition of Dirt as “matter out of place” and considers how choices are made when studying emotionally dense empirical material.

In Chapter 6 (Ethical trouble and considerations) I dwell on ethical aspects of methodological issues that I have faced during my doctoral studies and while writing this thesis. As ethical judgments have been important guides of theoretical and (particularly) methodological approaches, this chapter deeply addresses the ethical balancing acts involved. Dealing with existential matters, life and death does something to you, it changes you and forces you to take a stand. This chapter explains how I have tried to protect not only participants in the studies, but also myself, during this process.

In Act Two I *Articulate the phenomenon* this thesis addresses. Chapter 6 (Getting my hands dirty), the first of the act, explains my view that the empirical presentations should not be seen as raw data,
or a complete map of everything in my data bank. Instead they should be regarded as illustrative examples for readers to experience and feel, and to help my efforts to articulate three focal elements of the broader phenomenon — Bodies, Emotions and The Others — in the following three chapters. Chapter 7 (Bodies) offers experiences of how bodies are sexed, starved, and scarred in digital places readers may never have previously visited. Chapter 8 (Emotions) presents illustrative stories of strong emotions, such as grief for a lost child, a suicide and a child filled with fear and despair. In Chapter 9 (The Others) I give examples of various co-creators of these phenomena: the visitors, commenters, supporters and other participants in the sharing. In Chapter 10 (Things) I lend my voice to the digital things involved in the phenomenon — software, hardware and anywhere — in an attempt to allow technology to speak (which is important from a posthuman perspective).

In Act Three I try to Make sense of the material analytically, leaning on feminist technoscience. It is divided in four chapters; 12, 13, 14 and 15. In the first three (12, 13, 14) I consider how attempts can and should be made to understand this phenomenon from a posthuman perspective. In search for an apparatus I use diffraction as metaphor and methodology finding patterns of differences within. Those patterns form what I call Technoemotions. They are further elaborated in the following Chapter (15). Technoemotions are conceptually agents built on a posthuman understanding of how emotions are entangled between different actors in the apparatus creating the phenomenon.

The first concerns trust, which has long been seen as essential for human existence and appears to be a key technoemotion in posthuman existence, playing prominent roles in my material,
together with its counterpart distrust. The (dis)trust has human-to-human elements, but is filtered through and influenced by the techno, digital, and material elements. Trust may be embodied in the self, the other and/or the technology. It is also modulated by (and modulates) what I talk about in the second part of the chapter - Truth (real or fictional). Truth is a strongly unambiguous concept, which implies there is an opposite that we often call false. In this part of the chapter I discuss complications: truths may be expressed in fiction, and apparent truths may be fictional, or subject to certain conditions, but truth and fiction or falsity are always related and neither could exist without the other. I also question whose truths we should consider, and whether there can be several truths. The third part of the chapter deals with another technoemotion, (dis)Embodiment. We often seem to believe that we have no bodies online, although we populate it with pictures of bodies, and emotions connected to bodies, engraved in the techno elements and the design of the nonhuman things. Trust and truth are to be found in the embodied feelings of presentness or loneliness of the online body, a body without organs, a performative body of posthuman emotions. Finally, I talk about (eternal)Time and questions raised by the notion of digital time. How do we perceive time and eternity when time is no longer linear, and it may be impossible to distinguish the past, present and future?

The final act, Act Four: The End of the Beginning considers meta-level aspects of the phenomenon and possible ways to explore and understand the posthuman world we are inhabiting and co-creating: critical alternatives. Given the knowledge I have produced, I ask and consider several related questions. What does this phenomenon do to us? How can we understand aspects beyond the immediate material I have presented and how we are to become together (or apart) as
posthumanity? Who is responsible for the future to come and the past that haunts us? Where do we go from here? These are existential questions arising from a material that provides no answers, just more problems to address. I end this thesis with hope. Hope for a better future knowing that things can always be different.
2. Transdisciplinary foundations

This chapter is not a complete review of literature on related research. Since the phenomenon studied is highly transdisciplinary the chapter does not present any specific research area or literature in depth. Instead, it offers background information on key aspects of the explored phenomena, including social media, privacy, sharing, technology and design.

“New” Media and the birth of Web 2.0

In a famous paper “Net Surfers Don’t Ride Alone” Wellman and Gulia (1999) mapped out a broad research domain for the future, in which a social web would evolve to form a digital togetherness, significantly changing society in ways that no other digital innovation had done before. Several research fields soon emerged, concerning various issues related to the new, rapidly growing (and equally rapidly evolving) life online.

In September 2000 the Association of Internet Researchers (AoiR) held its first international conference on the theme “the State of the Interdisciplinary”, focusing on internet as a distinct interdisciplinary field of research, a new arena for life, work and pleasure (Consalvo and Ess 2011, Dutton 2013). Researchers within this area were studying what was then named “new media” or “new technology”, with great interest in questions regarding domestication of technology (see for example: Silverstone & Haddon 1996, Lie & Sorenson 1996, Ågren 1998, 2001, Ward, 2005) online identity (Turkle 1984, 1995, Stone 1996, Lindblad-Gidlund 2005, Markham 1998, Bakardjieva 2000), internet and everyday life (Wellman &
Haythornthwaite 2002; Rainie & Wellman 2012; Nyberg 2008; Croon-Fors 2006) and of course the growing culture of online gaming (see for example Taylor 2002, 2003, Jakobsson 2006).

Web 2.0, The Social Web or Social Media has been given many names, all referring to the same phenomenon, that is countless numbers of global digital meeting places where content is created for, by and of the users together. Social media include an “ecosystem” of online digital places with user-generated content in combination with an open and active social interaction (Ellison et al, 2007; Stefanone & Jang, 2007; boyd & Ellison 2007; Kaplan & Haenelin 2010). Another important part of the definition of social media is that the interaction that takes place can and will be saved and stored. The created content is therefore also persistent, replicable, researchable, scalable, searchable, and (of course) sharable (boyd 2008; Papacharissi & Gibson 2011; Taddicken 2014).

**Social media in numbers**

A quick glance at a few statistics shows that enormous numbers of people engage with and through social media, the ecosystem holds vast amounts of contents, and both the numbers and amounts are rapidly expanding. For example, at the end of 2013, Facebook reportedly had 1.19 billion active users⁵, while YouTube was reportedly getting 1 billion unique hits per month and was hosting over 6 million hours of filmed material⁶. Moreover, Wikipedia had published over 30 million articles, in 285 languages, within its main site in 2014⁷. No international counts of blogs are compiled, as they

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are hosted in numerous domains, countries and programs. However, Twingley counted 17 million blog posts in Swedish blog domains alone in 2012. These statistics provide clear indications of the scale of social media, and the phenomenon of online sharing is growing.

According to a recent report by the Swedish Internet Institute (Findahl 2012) 89% of the Swedish population use internet more than once a week, 64% are users of a social network site and 75% of 14 to 21 year-old girls read and write blogs every week. Sweden might be one of the most digitally connected countries in the world, but frequencies of users and use are also very high in other western countries. According to Forrester Research, for example, 75% of the US population regularly participates in social media and there is a clear growth of users not only in the younger generations but also in the middle-aged and slightly older population (Kaplan and Haenlin 2010) and according to Pew Internet Americans spend more time on SNS than on any other single online activity (Hampton et al. 2011). Furthermore, engaging with and through social media is not solely a youth phenomenon as some claim, on the contrary millions of people from all generations are engaging with various aspects of social media as we speak, thus they potentially provide bridges between generations (Loos et al. 2012).

**Sharing as norm**

During the years sharing has been given different meanings in relation to digital places and actions. First we spoke of sharing as an activity connected to illegal file-sharing cultures (see for example Lindgren 2007, 2013). When talking about sharing today we usually mean posting or re-posting social media content. Sharing is actually

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8. [https://www.twingly.com](https://www.twingly.com) (14-01-29)
the very fundament of social media in general and social network sites in particular, as it provides both the content and the glue that makes social media social (Loos et al. 2012). Sharing is what social media is built on and is what makes it global. Sharing as a personal act is also an important driving force of self-disclosure and the new public privacy. Blogs, wikis, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snap chat and countless other social media programs all encourage us to “share” through some kind of button that enables the content to travel from one platform to another within the social web (Van Dijck 2013).

Posting a status update is sharing. Everything we do within social media is actually sharing. “Sharing is caring” is a well-known expression that McLuhan (1964) would probably refer to as equivalent to “The Medium is the Message”, giving agency to the relation between the sharing and caring. But if sharing is the foundation and content-generating element of social media, what does it do to us? What are the relationships involved like? Does the medium affect the message or the message the medium? What if social media makes people believe that the message is the medium?

**Public privacy**

Social media contains billions of shared personal stories about every aspect of life, from the most mundane everyday happenings, such as dinner plans or working hours, to more serious topics concerning health, politics, science or existential matters such as life and death. Along with social media becoming part of our everyday lives, we also seem to be gradually sharing more of our selves in this digital togetherness, slowly moving our boundaries about what should be
considered as private and/or personal information that is sharable in a public context.

An important, complex and intensely debated dimension of widespread sharing online is public privacy. Many users demand that internet must be a free democratic space for anyone to move and act within, but many also demand that it must be free of content that is uncomfortable, threatening or dangerous. Similarly, many people resist or condemn any attempt by governments, corporations or the military to monitor internet due to a strong belief that it is (or should be) a space where humanity can practice freedom of speech and freedom to move and live a digital life without anyone collecting information about our activities. In contrast, all governments and numerous corporations do collect information about our online activities for various reasons, ranging from targeting commercials to countering terrorism or pedophilia. Thus, the openness of internet, and governments’ surveillance of it, raises major ethical issues (Krishnamurthy & Wills 2009).

Furthermore, while social network sites offer different levels of privacy settings the tools for adjusting the settings are seldom readily visible to, or fully understood by, the users (Livingstone 2008, Gross & Acquisti 2005, Brown 2010). Some studies have also found that program updates often re-set privacy settings to default, which is often equivalent to “open profile” (Ibid). Related studies on internet privacy often focus more on external threats to personal integrity online than on users’ perceived experience of online privacy (Van der Velden & Emam, 2013). This too is a complex issue, as it can be argued that personal responsibility is required to maintain personal integrity, but some potentially vulnerable people, notably teenagers, may be aware of the need for precautions but do not always act
accordingly (Siljerud et al. 2008, Madden et al. 2013, Van der Velden & Emam, 2013). Thus, there seems to be an imbalance between users’ expectations and their doings, sometimes related to the design of privacy settings and their placing in the interfaces of the programs involved (Ibid.).

On blogs and forums privacy issues are more matters for individual users to address. Most current blog engines have privacy settings, so a blog can be open for everyone to read or closed behind a log-in. Forums often offer users anonymity to protect their privacy. However, perceptions of the privacy of blogs and forums are often inaccurate; users reportedly often feel secure and private while knowing they are acting in a public arena (Svedmark & Nyberg 2009, Nissenbaum 2004, 2010).

Social media are fundamentally designed for communicating and sharing, so protecting users’ privacy and integrity is likely to be far from the main priority of their designers and providers. The program terms and conditions often include clauses in the small print about the delegation of use, and/or assigning rights over the uploaded content such as photos and video clips to the providers. The small print rarely states if your privacy settings affect these terms, so theoretically you could have a closed profile but your material could still be exposed through agreements you signed (but probably did not read).

**Technology and the user**

An ethnographic study of the interaction between technology and young users at one of the first large SNS in the world, Lunarstorm, presented by Skog (2010) concluded that social interactions were formed not only by its users but also by the technology and the
design of features within the network. Skog effectively showed that not only do we do things to social media, social media also does things to us. There is an intentionality within the interactions that is not only human technology in itself is also performing (ibid).

The user was at this time an expanding concept, moving from an organizational-oriented setting to a performing (human) subject living with technology through technology, by technology and of technology in everyday life (Croon 2006, Lindblad-Gidlund 2005, Nyberg 2008). Users were suddenly not merely using technology but also producing content on their own, engaging with each other and in the design of a social digital togetherness. Accordingly, usability became a key property of systems used in human-computer interactions (HCI). This refers to systems’ safety, convenience to use, ease to learn and fitness for purpose (Preece 1994), and the focus of designers (and HCI researchers) shifted to include context of use and expected value (Löwgren & Stolterman 2004, Wiberg 2003). Nielsen, often regarded as the father of usability (in design thinking), in terms of creating human-centered products and services, says that products should not be confusing, irritating or frustrating – that is simply evidence of bad design (1999). Instead they should be designed to provide pleasure, beauty and functionality. He also clearly raises the importance of emotional responses as factors of good design by asking the rhetorical question “Have you ever wondered why cheap whine tastes better in fancy glasses?” In this sense, anything that makes us feel better is successful design, from a usability perspective. For example, robots should look like people and, even better as young children, evoking instinctive senses of care and love for them in us (Ibid).
Turning to social media, the usability concept seems to be clear. The various platforms are designed to facilitate and smooth our digital connections and online life. We get programs, apps and engines designed for transparency and intuitive use, while the technological complexity is well hidden and black-boxed. Algorithms are developed and embedded within most social media today, aiming to assist seamless interaction, through which we are served with information and social feeds that the algorithms’ designers think we want—or need. We are faced with trackers and cookies mapping how and where we are moving online, and offline whenever we carry a digital device with us\(^9\). We become technohuman units moving together in a hybrid space, towards destinations that are far from easy to perceive.

**Designing a future**

Social media offer us a digital togetherness where we are always present. In a connected world filled with technological possibilities and a constant digital presence, we can still be alone but now we are alone together (Turkle 2012). The digital togetherness is built upon a self-image of being here and there at the same time, distributing ourselves, never distant, never disconnected, but also never fully present (Ibid). We become together online as we connect and play out joint life narratives in alternative spaces.

Researching roles, effects and implications of human computer interactions in settings such as social media requires interdisciplinary inquiry, with inputs from diverse disciplines such as informatics, sociology, psychology, law, computer science, information systems (IS), computer supported cooperative work

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\(^9\) When installing a new App in your mobile device users are often asked if they want it to track where they are. This is presented as an option for making everyday life a little more comfortable since they do not then need to tell the app where they are— it already knows.

“Humans did not discover fire – they designed it” is the first sentence in the book The Design Way by Nelson and Stolterman (2012), highlighting the importance of understanding that the world is not an autonomous thing “out there” but instead a designed space - as nothing discovers itself (Ibid). Accordingly, one can say that design always defines and changes who we are and who we are to become. However, design is not only about the artifacts and their intended uses - it is also about making new practices of death and destruction. For example, designing how to make and control fire opened the door to a more civilized and comfortable way of living, but it also opened the door for pyromaniacs. Designing an airplane is also to design a plane crash, designing a hammer is to design both a tool and a murder weapon, and so forth. Artifacts always have more potential uses than those intentionally planned by the original designers. Thus, designed matter of any kind always lives a life of its own parallel to the designer’s intentions (Nelson and Stolterman, 2012), and a design can be considered as a kind of superstate, like Schrödinger’s

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When our ancestors carved the first flint weapon we became much more potent hunters and since the day the Wright Brothers launched their flying machine the world has had air travelers as well as pilots. We are what we do in this sense as everything becomes in the moment of designerly intra-actions.
cat, which is always both alive and dead until you open the box\textsuperscript{11}. In the book \textit{The original accident} Virilio (2007) writes about a similar observation: that every designed thing has at least one counterpart within itself. At the same time humans seem to have a strong desire to design perfect artifacts, such as a perpetual motion machine or something that can never be destroyed. So we use our knowledge to design better things, more sustainable things with the goal to reach fulfillment (or eternity?). We built \textit{Titanic}, convinced that we have all the knowledge required to build an unsinkable ship. That went well...

In the context of social media, norm-breaking sharing online is one of the non-expected uses that has arisen, the growing frequency of hate-speech is another. Design of social media poses serious challenges as they seem to affect and shape our everyday life in an entire world. It seems to make us dis/connected, creating a here/now, frozen in past/present/future. Who is really responsible for our becomings in social media? And can anyone or anything actually respond?

\textsuperscript{11} In a famous thought experiment Schrödinger (1935) considered a cat in a box with a Geiger counter, a bottle of poison and a radioactive atom, that may or may not have decayed (with 50% probability) at any given time. If the Geiger counter detects that the radioactive atom has decayed, it will trigger the smashing of the bottle of poison and the cat will die. Schrödinger said that according to quantum mechanics theory, especially the Copenhagen school in which Nils Bohr and Werner Heisenberg were prominent, the cat would be in an absurd superstate, both alive and dead as long as the box was still closed since there were 50% probabilities of both outcomes. Schrödinger never accepted analogous superstates of matter, or Bohr’s demonstration that an electron can be in two places simultaneously – at least until something interacts and makes the universe chose one or the other state.
3. Projects involved

Vast amounts of material have been gathered for this thesis through various projects, all with different research questions and knowledge production aims. In each of them I have engaged in the requested research, but also gathered material for this thesis. This chapter presents a brief overview of the projects the thesis is based upon.

A variety of material

During the last seven years I have participated in several projects, all with a qualitative research profile. The empirical material drawn from these projects has been collected for different purposes and to address different research questions than those associated with this thesis, and often more concrete and direct knowledge was asked for. However, I see this as a strength rather than a weakness, since participation in those projects has helped me understand the importance of not making borders or cuts that are fixed or closed from the start. Changing focus has forced me to revisit my material and widen my mind to be receptive to new perspectives, questions and considerations that have continuously arisen from the material during all of the projects. New questions will keep arising from this material as this type of emotionally dense data refuses to sit still or be silent. Nevertheless, in this thesis I must encapsulate my findings, so I must try to “freeze” the material briefly in order for me to analyze and understand what I have encountered.

Most of the empirical material underlying thesis was gathered in four projects: IT for a Quality of Life, Umeå Live, Online Sexual Exposure and When Life Hurts. All these projects had different
angles, aims and structures, and I had a different role as a researcher in each of them. They are briefly described in the following sections, then summarized in a table listing the kinds of material gathered, the methods used and the frequency or duration of data gathering in each project.

**Some words on qualitative methodology**

In all four of the projects I used traditional qualitative methods for data collection, including compilation of written\(^{12}\) (Project 3), in-depth interviews\(^{13}\) (Project 1) and non-participatory observations\(^{14}\) (Projects 2, 3 and 4). Notably, there are two significant differences in my methodological approach between two pairs of these projects. In Projects 1 and 3 I came into direct contact with the informants of the study through use of interviews and narrative writing for collecting data. Thus, the informants were aware of my presence and had given informed consent to participate in the research. In Projects 2 and 4 I was not in contact with the subjects, instead I was a non-participatory observer in public and open social media places. Thus, the people observed were not informed of my presence, for ethical reasons discussed in Chapter 6.

**Project 1: IT for a Quality of Life**

The first project I gathered important material from was *IT for a Quality of Life*, financed by the Swedish research foundation

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\(^{12}\) Inspired by Mishler (1995) and Riessman (1993, 2008) and Holloway & Jefferson (2000) in this project informants were asked to write life narratives based on 4-5 themes sent to them. Their texts were subsequently used to analyze their own perceptions of sexual exposure online.

\(^{13}\) An in-depth interview involves free conversation around a topic of interest (Kvale 1996). In my interviews I had set themes to talk about, but no questions to answer.

\(^{14}\) Non-participatory observations are only possible online, since we can only be present without being seen in online settings (Hine 2000). In my observations I have visited blogs, forums and other social media sites without any kind of contact. I have never left any sign of my presence except my IP number.
Vinnova and conducted in 2001-2004. The project was led by Professor Erik Stolterman and coordinated by Associate Professor Anna Croon Fors. The overall aim was to explore and create a deeper understanding of people’s everyday use and sense-making of information technology. The project addressed questions around living with and through information technology as it was becoming a natural part of people’s everyday lives. At the time of this project I was a master student and was fortunately invited to join the Life research group while writing my master’s thesis. I was invited to participate in project meetings and reading sessions. I also had great opportunities to talk to the more senior researchers attached to the project.

My master’s thesis eventually focused on a single case study concerning a man called Mats and his, at the time, intriguing and provocative use of internet as a place for emotional sharing and grief (Ikonomidis Svedmark 2002). Mats had prepared a website to commemorate the birth of his first child, but within 48 hours of birth his son died, so the site rapidly changed during this brief time from a celebratory place of hopes and dreams to a commutative place for live updates on his son’s health to a virtual grave. It was a shaking experience for me as a young master’s student to be involved in such existential matter. However, it was also powerful and important, because when I subsequently interviewed Mats I came into close emotional contact with life and death, thereby losing fear of researching matters that hurt or are highly sensitive. Thus, this case not only provided material for my master’s thesis, but also set my compass towards the core elements of this thesis: privacy, emotions and becoming with technology. Studying how Mats created a tribute website to his firstborn broadened my perspective and my master’s thesis provided us (or me at least) important new insights and
questions on the entangled emotional-human-technology relationships.

**Project 2: Umea Live**

The second project underlying this thesis, *Umeå Live*, was a four-year action-based project established as a regional Living Lab in the north of Sweden. It was led by Assistant Professor Per Levén, coordinated by Assistant Professor Annakarin Nyberg, and funded by Vinnova. I joined this project in spring 2006 as a part-time researcher assigned to map and make sense of uncomfortable digital meeting places and emotional distress online. I participated in this project for approximately 18 months, collecting data, participating in conferences and writing short papers and blog posts about my findings. The data collection at this time was not guided by any specific research question(s), but by my interest in dark sides of life connected to our increasing everyday interaction with and through internet. I encountered and considered many cases and themes while I participated in this project, and neatly compiling them is not easy (although I will try). A common aspect of the material from this project is that it was all very emotional, so much sometimes that I had to leave it without any further analysis or investigation. In retrospect I see three major themes in my material from this project, as briefly outlined below.

The first theme is *Eating disorders*. I started out mapping so-called ProAna and Thinspiration phenomena on YouTube, various blogs and other websites. ProAna refers to the promotion of anorexia by a community (mainly girls) as not a disease, but a lifestyle they have chosen. They often also promote other eating disorders, such as bulimia (ProMia) and post “thinspirational” pictures and video clips of extremely slim (most of us would say starving) celebrities to
inspire efforts to follow them. The ProAna blogs and forums are complex, as members of this community have inconsistent and changing standpoints regarding whether they are sick or have simply chosen to have unconventional relationships to food and their bodies. I started research regarding this theme with the intentions to acquire non-participatory observations of the digital material and conduct interviews. The latter failed for ethical reasons, as discussed in Chapter 6, so the material I have used from this part of the research is only based on my observations.

The second theme is Self-harm, people hurting themselves on purpose, often by cutting or burning parts of their body. One might think that self-harm is a cry for help and perhaps a suicidal act. However, after experiencing digital self-harm material online I have understood that this is not usually the case – instead self-harm is regarded by its practitioners as a way to survive, by stopping anxiety and psychological pain. I have observed approximately 10 blogs with a strong focus on self-harm, which contain text and pictures of cuts and burn marks. I have never contacted any self-harming individual; instead I have stayed at a distance, never leaving a comment or “like”. This was almost the hardest part of collecting the material linked to this theme.

The third theme is Mental illness and/or Suicide. Suicide is an uncomfortable topic and it has been difficult to focus closely on this material, intellectually as well as emotionally. Mental illness is widely represented in blogs. Suicide is often talked about by others, particularly grieving parents and relatives who have lost a loved one. It is also discussed on blogs and forums by people considering ending life. At the time of this project there was also a large site promoting suicide, providing information on how to kill yourself
most effectively. I studied this pro-suicide sight for the project but mostly I visited various blogs, forums and chats populated with people who were experiencing or had experienced mental illness and suicidal thoughts. Most of the blogs I followed for a couple of weeks or a month, but others I have read for years. Some of the bloggers involved are no longer with us since they chose to die. My interest and research questions focused on making sense of this online phenomenon: who are involved, what does engagement in it do to the writers and the co-creators/participants, how do people express themselves in words, photos, blog design etc. Dealing with this topic raised many ethical dilemmas and there have been times when I had to stop research activities in order to save lives\textsuperscript{15}. This has affected me as well as my research, as further discussed in Chapter 6.

A fourth theme I touched upon in this project was \textit{Child pornography}. I did not anticipate pursuing this theme but it came to me. One day I received an e-mail from a pedophile wanting to have a discussion with me (as a researcher) on how to make sex between adults and children legal. This person revealed secret links to a community of blogs where European pedophiles wrote posts with political arguments for legalizing their activities. At about the same time I attended a large international conference on child pornography in Stockholm (2007) thinking I might reconsider my aversion to this topic since I felt a strong obligation to do something, to make a difference. After spending two days at this event I dropped the theme like a hot potato. It was far beyond my ability as a mother and researcher to deal with. This topic was beyond me, too dark for

\textsuperscript{15} Once I stumbled across a very young girl (aged 12) who was a sister of a suicide victim. She happened to live in my home town and I recognized the name of a school she mentioned. This girl was clearly expressing an intention to follow her sister and hang herself. I could not ignore this knowledge so I abandoned the case for my research and contacted her school providing them with the information I had. The school acted quickly and the girl is still with us today.
me to handle. Although I never intensively addressed the theme of child pornography, my brief encounter with the field has haunted me. Just writing about it here makes my stomach turn and I know instantly that this topic (which I barely touched), has scarred me and thus probably influenced my further research. How could it not?

**Project 3: Sexual Online Exposure Among Youth & Young Adults**

In late fall, 2008, a colleague and I started a project named *Sexual Online Exposure Among Youth and Young Adults*, funded by the Swedish Ministry of Youth Affairs\(^\text{16}\) and led by Assistant Professor Annakarin Nyberg and me. It was a six-month project aiming to create knowledge about teenagers’ and young adults’ own views of sexually exposing bodies online, and both their lived experience of and thoughts regarding such activity, which older generations would regard as “risk behavior”. The project also addressed questions concerning the role of technology in the phenomenon of bodily exposure, involving technology as an active agent. Data were collected for this project, through observations and written narrative texts collected in three stages. The methods were chosen in an attempt to maximize chances of getting indications not only about what people do, but also why they do it, and their experience of it. Inviting a group of young participants to write narratives would help us achieve this aim without making them uncomfortable in dealing with the controversial topic. Furthermore, using a strict interview guide (another possible option) can restrict participants’ answers and create more bias than if they are free to tell their own story about what is important to them, their motives and feelings (Riessman 1993, Nyberg 2008). Narrative methodology allows people to create

\(^{16}\) Ungdomsstyrelsen
meaning of relatively complex situations by describing their experiences and thoughts in narrative form, that is, in stories (Mishler 1995). It was important for the project to be observant of not only what the informants said they do but also how they said it, how they felt about it and how they explained the stories they shared with us in their narratives. By giving the young informants space to write their own narratives they could also let us share (within the limitations of any text) their lived experiences, re-packaging them in stories with a beginning and an end, thereby providing them opportunities to expand their own knowledge about themselves and their actions (Reissman 2008, Ricour 1984).

This project was approved by the Swedish Ethical Research Board17 June 9, 2009, after rather lengthy explanations for the board about the unique characteristics, ethical dimensions and (hence) ethical requirements of Internet studies, as discussed in Chapter 6.

**Project 4: When life hurts**

Project four was a longitudinal study designed to be my main PhD project. It was originally named: *When life hurts - a study of sharing emotional content and boundary breaking narratives online*. In this project I gathered a vast amount of data based on the three previous projects. Instead of focusing on a geographical place online I have drifted with the phenomenon of norm breaking online sharing with a focus on emotional and bodily expressions. It is a nebulous phenomenon, so I did not impose pre-set restraints on my exploration. Instead, I sought for life narratives in blogs where I could not only study what was written but also indications of why they written. Some were being written when I encountered them,

17 Etikprövningsnämnden
while others were old and had been long abandoned for unknown reasons, leaving their content for me and others to experience much later. In this project I have also included data from Apberget, a local SNS that covered 89% of the young population in my hometown just before Facebook entered the scene. Facebook was also included in this project since I have collected status updates of users when they were breaking unspoken rules or social norms for years. It also included the one and only case of online suicide to date in Sweden.

In summary, I have too much material to handle in a single PhD thesis. Thus, partly for this reason, and partly for ethical reasons (see Chapter 6), I have chosen to conjoin many of the stories. I have also excluded several cases and studies for ethical reasons (to protect participants from harm), and some because they fall outside of what is considered norm-breaking sharing today. In Act 2 I articulate the phenomenon and present several of the themes that emerged in the four projects described above in more detail. I end this Act with tables summarizing the themes, venues, content, collected data and methods used in the four projects.
### Tables of collected data

Table 1. Project 1; *IT and the Quality of Life*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Arena</th>
<th>Synopsis of content</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Death and Grief</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>The project focused on a single case, framed by a simple website constructed by Mats about his lost son. It presented texts, photos and music from the short time his son was alive, his death, his funeral and the life that followed</td>
<td>Non-participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Digital Guestbook</td>
<td>Attached to the website was a guestbook with a simple design offering people visiting the site opportunities for live interaction, unusually as this was before the explosion of blogs. Over 1000 posts in the guestbook by Mats, his wife, relatives, friends and numerous unknown others.</td>
<td>Non-participatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mats’ home</td>
<td>Approx. 2 hours tape-recorded interview.</td>
<td>I visited Mats in his home to conduct a deep interview with him and his wife. His wife chose not to participate eventually so the only interviewee was Mats. I was also invited to observe the place where they kept their only computer, and had decorated with candles, flowers and photos after their son’s death.</td>
<td>Deep semi-structured, face to face interview.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. Project 2; Umeå Live

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Arena</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eating disorder</td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>ProAna, ProMia personal blogs with a narrative character.</td>
<td>Approx. 20 blogs</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>Anorexia Boot Camp</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>Thinspiration videos</td>
<td></td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self- harm</td>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>Self-harm blogs with narrative- like texts and photos</td>
<td>Approx. 30 clips</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Suicide instructions</td>
<td>Approx. 10 blogs</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chat Forum</td>
<td>Suicide discussions in both Swedish and English</td>
<td>Three chat forums. Visited regularly during three months.</td>
<td>Observations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18 The blogs included in my material are seldom pure ProAna or ProMia. Instead they tend to alternate between recognition and denial. They are filled with agony and mental pain, fear and hope of getting rid of the disorders while simultaneously linking a community sharing them, and supporting each other’s attempts to starve themselves, applauding weight losses and others’ achievements towards obtaining or maintaining a skinny body.

19 ABC was a website presenting material related to anorexia ranging from inspiration through photos of super skinny celebrities to guides for becoming anorexic by following a specific diet and instruction on the site.?

20 Video clips with skinny models and/or celebrities focusing on slim bodies. These types of video clips are often made as collages aiming to inspire viewers to starve.

21 “The guide to a perfect suicide”, a website providing instructions on ways to commit suicide efficiently. This website was officially closed in 2011 after several complaints.
Table 3. Project 3; Sexual Online Exposure Among Youth and Young Adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Arena</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online bodies</td>
<td>Personal blogs</td>
<td>General view of atmosphere, language and themes of teenagers’ and young adults’ blogs.</td>
<td>Approx. 200 blogs</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro photo blogs 22</td>
<td>General view of types of photos that are uploaded, rated and mostly liked/disliked.</td>
<td>Approx. 300 photos</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal blogs</td>
<td>From the 200 blogs mentioned above we chose 36 that exposed bodies particularly often. Some of them had a sexual theme while others showed exposed bodies in various positions but not with a clear sexual intent.</td>
<td>36 blogs</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narratives</td>
<td>For five weeks we sent 15 participants aged 15-25 years (10 female, 5 male) who wanted to contribute written narratives a theme/week to write about. 23</td>
<td>15 participants</td>
<td>Written narratives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22 snyggast.se, bilddagboken.se
23 The themes were: 1) Online sexual exposure and risks, 2) Technology and design, 3) Aim of communication, 4) Anonymity, and 5) When things go wrong.
Table 4. Project 4; When life hurts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arena</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal blogs</td>
<td>Various kinds of content but all with a strong focus on emotional sharing. Themes included: cancer, grief, suicide, eating disorders, mental illness, hate, fear and abuse.</td>
<td>Approx. 60 blogs</td>
<td>Non-participatory observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flashback²⁴</td>
<td>Online suicide</td>
<td>One case</td>
<td>Non-participatory observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aperget.se</td>
<td>Aperget was a local SNS targeting most of the young population in the city I live. This had a more open design than Facebook – letting everybody in on the personal page with no privacy limitations. The site also had an official diary collection where you could target specific themes like suicide or grief.</td>
<td>Visited daily for 2 years²⁵</td>
<td>Non-participatory observations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

²⁴ Swedish forum comparable to Reddit
²⁵ Undercover as a 14-year-old boy
4. Perspectives

This chapter deals with theory as method and method as theory. Taking an active decision to examine the world from a specific perspective will affect the researcher's perceptions and knowledge produced. Every researcher is standing somewhere, adopting a perspective, an idea of how and why we can make sense of the world around us. This chapter undresses my agenda and the perspectives from which I gaze, take in information, investigate and explore.

Being a modest witness with a feminist agenda

A modest witness is someone willing to see, attest, be publicly accountable for, and psychically vulnerable to her visions and representations of the world (Haraway 1997). As a PhD candidate engaged in informatics studies but also a member of Umeå Centre for Gender Studies I consider myself as a researcher with a feminist agenda. By this I mean a modest witness who (following a long feminist tradition) is set out to break stereotypes and ideas of sameness, to question what is taken for granted and to contest mainstream knowledge production.

Leaning on the broad tradition within feminist studies and feminist theory I emphasize that knowledge is not to be understood as objective, but rather as situated - attached not only to the studied phenomena but also to the researcher involved (Harding 1989, Star 1991, Butler 1990, Haraway 1991, Suchman 2002, 2007). This also means that as a modest witness I need to question the way I see the world and strive to understand what preconceptions and biases are affecting my views. A modest witness “cannot afford self-invisibility”
in order to seek knowledge about the unknown or unspoken (Haraway 1997). I need to take a stand.

When I started out on my PhD journey I intended to investigate untraditional ways of using internet when in emotional distress of any kind. As I was watching and silently participating in what played out before my eyes my intentions at first were to write an empirically dense PhD thesis, focusing on young generations use and relations to internet since they ware most frequent with this type of use. As the material grew I understood that this is much larger than a generation-bound phenomenon and as social media spread out into people’s everyday lives I saw new kinds of users becoming engaged. The material I was collecting became more emotional than I had foreseen and I strongly felt that I needed an escape. This is when I turned to theory. Theory became my oasis through the later process of gathering and analyzing the material underlying this thesis. When existential matters have been raised and people in front of me have chosen death instead of life, the theories were there for me, comforting me by offering me new alternative ways of understanding the world in front of me. The articles and books became my oasis when the material I had on my desktop was too difficult to handle. By resting in theory I have been able to approach my material repeatedly, but with a chosen and perhaps controlled distance and with a new understanding of the knowledge I was about to create. This chapter has a certain heaviness, but in order to understand how and why I have conducted my research in the manner I have it is crucial to also get a deeper understanding of the theories that form the foundations not only of this thesis, but also of my way of interpreting the world.
Tracing back in time we find the so-called Linguistic Turn within social science and humanities that occurred in the 1960s. The Linguistic Turn offered a way out of the essentialist search for social and/or human patterns of objective truth(s) that dominated science at the time (Rorty 1992). Turning towards the constitution of language one could suddenly see patterns of power in large discourses. The Linguistic Turn gave birth to what we call social constructivism and has influenced ideas about knowledge within science generally, and in social sciences and humanities particularly, where gender, politics, sexualities, class, ethnicity, religion and more topics suddenly acquired new resonances and importance. Feminist scholars have studied women, men and the social relations across disciplines and old traditions. The growing understanding of how social gender relates to power and politics has provided a strong and important platform within feminist theory, where language and discourses have been effective tools for mapping and reflecting on different social settings (Buikema et al 2011). What is striking though is that the social constructivism has a strong emphasis on the human as the subject of matter, the subject of attention not regarding the matter of matter (Åsberg & Lykke 2010).

Materiality, the knowledge of matter, has been rooted in natural sciences and medicine, where nature has been traditionally explored and treated as matter that can be objectively manipulated and measured. The modernist perspective on the world is that it is out there; we merely need to acquire understanding of ways to measure it. Feminism, in contrast, is rooted in a postmodern tradition where linguistics and discursive practices rule. The feminist tradition emphasizes that there is no such thing as objectivity; nothing can be measured (or measurement gauged) without considering the cultural and linguistic setting discourses create our understandings of matter,
giving it shape and meaning. There is no objective truth or essence in matter, it is all constructed.

Many feminists have focused on the role of language as the constructor of social reality and our understanding of the world. This turn toward language has been important in order to understand the complexity of power relations, gendered practices and subjectivity in knowledge production. It has helped us further to define and understand the power relations that lie within cultural systems such as class, race, sexuality and power. Postmodern feminists have argued that the male/female dichotomy informs almost all other dichotomies that ground western societies and thoughts: culture/nature, mind/body, subject/object, rational/emotional and so on (Alaimo & Hekman 2008, Hirdman 2001). Second wave feminism has significantly adopted these postmodern insights, emphasizing the importance of deconstructing these dichotomies in order to advance an understanding of the world that does not rest on one or the other side. However, at the same time there is a will to deconstruct all types except language/real (Alaimo & Hekman 2008). Natural science and medicine have epistemological groundings in the belief that we have objective access to the real/natural world, while the postmodernists argue that these groundings are constructions that we make through language; everything that we call real is a product of our understanding and composing of language (Ibid). It should be noted that feminist theory has addressed aspects of materiality, such as the body, but focused on how we interpret and make the body, give it meaning through language, as a product of discourse about the body as matter (Butler 1990, 1993).
Me as the Situated Knower

The term situated knowledge can be seen as a critique of the “god-trick” – the supposed possibility to perform “objective” research - research based on faceless, bodiless and contextless objects without being affected or affecting the surrounding world (Haraway 1985, 1991, Lykke 2010). According to Haraway (ibid) the god-trick is nothing more than an illusion that the world is an object of study, that there is a way to produce objective knowledge without the influences of power, ethics and/or subjectivity. A critique of the feminist agenda often comes from postmodernist thinkers, claiming that situated knowledge merely leads to relativism and a bunch of “stories” saying something specific, but not really generating knowledge that can be used (Lykke 2010). I have met this critique many times and I will always remember my first conference where I presented a paper on a case with intriguing use of technology through grief and emotional distress. The chair of the session asked me: “Tell me Eva – why are you coming to this conference with your sad little story?” suggesting my research was only of my own private concerns.

My presence in this thesis is my situatedness, I am situated in the phenomenon I have studied and in the knowledge production that is taking place through preparing and presenting this text. Being a feminist researcher I have no intention of pretending to be standing outside – pointing at objective happenings or neutral knowledge since my theoretical foundation tells me there is no such thing. This does not mean that everything is relative and that there is no world out there to describe, but as Haraway (1991) would put it, we can never go beyond the world and the reality we are captured in, but we have an obligation to reflect on the situation we are looking from, taking a stand while at the same time taking responsibility for how
the knowledge we produce is located in time, space, body, history and culture (Lykke 2010).

Studying norm-breaking online sharing is not a neutral activity. My “non-participatory observations” are not non-participatory in the sense that I am not connected to the phenomenon – I am merely not actively involving myself or making contact with the others. However, I do engage with the technology at hand, with blog engines, forum sites and social media places. I am a modest witness of what happens within my sight (my reflected view), and a situated knower of what is in my site (location) (Ibid). That is; I study what I see (using see and sight here as convenient terms to describe perceptions obtained from all available senses) and encounter while being located at a specific site. A site is never neutral, and as a researcher I try to reflect on my siting as well as on my sighting connecting me and entangling me with the larger picture of the phenomenon. This way we can, according to Haraway (1991), “talk with an authoritative voice about the partial reality we can see - and we make our self ethico-politically responsible, democratic players in it” (Lykke 2010). That is – I can avoid the god-trick and the position of a postmodern relativist by acting as a guide to knowledge through myself and my outspoken standpoint(s). As a guide I am showing a possible path to walk on, not claiming it is the one and only path, but a possible way forward, according to my expertise and knowledge. This path in no way neutral or chosen objectively, and there might also be other paths that lead forward. As Lykke writes “The guide is not a relativist; on the contrary she has committed herself to sharing with the traveler her knowledge about the landscape – to show, to give tips, to explain, to point out. [...] the guide is not an irrefutable authority.” (Ibid).
**Technoscience**

In the last three decades technoscience has drawn the attention of scholars rooted in various disciplines, including sociology, computer and technology science, social informatics and philosophy of science. Technoscience emphasizes an entanglement of science and technology, and focused initially on issues concerning new way of doing scientific activities as opposed to the more traditional way of searching for knowledge. Gilbert Hottois first applied the term “technoscience” in his work on ethics and technology in the late 1970s, at about the same time as Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar presented their work on social construction in their famous piece *Laboratory life* (1979). Latour later became associated with technoscience through his work *Science in action* (1987), using technoscience to describe the entangling and disentangling of practices, people, objects and methodologies in scientific activities. Technoscience became the foundation of Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) and the STS tradition, in which knowledge building and theory development are intended to show how we live our life and produce scientific knowledge in a collective of humans and non-humans, intertwined in a network of connections. In Latour’s work *agency* is regarded as something every entity included in the network possesses, human and non-human (1987). Don Ihde and Andrew Pickering have provided other important foundations for the field of technoscience, in the form of philosophical insights concerning human-technology relations (Ihde 1990, Pickering 1995, Ihde & Selinger 2003).

**Feminist Technoscience**

In the late 1980s Donna Haraway stepped into the arena, making technoscience one of her key concepts (Haraway 1985, 1991, 1997).
Adopting the common ground of technoscience Haraway shifted a stream of technoscience in a feminist direction, in which politics and power are important additions. Everything is political she claimed, meaning that everything we do has implications for who we are and what we become together. This is important when we do science since it affects the knowledge we produce - or do not produce. In relation to technology Haraway stated that “technology is not neutral. We're inside of what we make, and it's inside of us. We're living in a world of connections and it matters which ones get made and unmade” (Haraway 1997).

Through her grounded feminist standpoint Haraway identified a collapse of traditional dichotomies in science, such as nature and culture, machines and humans, men and women. In Hardaway's entire lifework we find analyses of the relationship(s) between nature, technology and culture within a technoscience tradition, but also though her struggle with emphasizing a hybrid character in the real world – the cyborg (1985). Haraway declares that we should no longer consider ourselves as humans separated from any thing or any one. Instead we are all cyborgs, living in a world of relations and hybrids between humans, animals and machines. In her famous Cyborg Manifesto she declares that we have always been cyborgs, and we must take responsibility for the fact that we are political beings intertwined with technology and nature. Our identities are cyborgian through every aspect of life, giving us opportunities to contest and shape the power relations in our mediated society. Haraway claims that as cyborgs we are neither human nor machine, but hybrid “cybernetic organisms”, mutually creating each other, destroying each other and forming our future together (1985, 1991, 1997).
Haraway uses feminism to stress the importance, when doing science, of admitting our basic understanding that there are power relations and political dimensions in our being in the world as cyborgs. Pleading for the world to take responsibility for the kind of science it produces (and from where) Haraway writes; “Our bodies are maps of power and identity. Cyborgs are no exceptions. A cyborg body is not innocent: it was not born in a garden; it does not seek unitary identity; it does not take irony for granted. [...] The machine is us, our process, and an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they” (Ibid).

**Posthumanism (and the speaking of things)**

The only things we can understand and build knowledge around are phenomena, according to Barad (2003). This is in line with traditional phenomenology (Husserl 1931, Heidegger 1962, Merleau-Ponty 1962 etc.), except in Barad’s posthuman understanding of what constitutes a phenomenon. Traditional phenomenology has a human-centered tradition, focusing on the human experience of phenomena. Taking a posthumanist perspective on phenomenology like Barad adds, or perhaps more correctly breaks down this anthropocentric worldview giving power to all the different parts of a phenomenon, creating a human/non-human phenomenology, sometimes referred to as post-phenomenology or posthuman phenomenology. Post-phenomenology can be seen as a modified, hybrid form of phenomenology through its willingness to give room for agency and intentionality between the human/non-human participants (Verbeek 2008). Agency is, in this view, not something that is subscribed to human or a non-human entity; instead it is something that occurs in the entangled relations between subjects.
and objects. Agency is a relational practice. Intra-action is the term Barad uses for these relations, pointing out that a phenomenon is to be seen as a process of mutual becoming (Barad 2003, 2007).

With feminist technoscience and posthuman phenomenology we find ourselves with a new ontology, building on the process of becoming together instead of being apart, performative acts and relations that are intra-acting in an entangled mess (Hekman 2010, Barad 2003, 2007, Introna 2013). Performativity as such has origins in language referring to performative speech acts. Judith Butler is famous for her work on the notion of performativity in relation to how we make gender. Butler (1993) gives agency to language, showing how performative acts of power relations and gender are constantly producing and re-producing a hegemonic society with patriarchic structures. Butler does give social-materiality a performative acknowledgement in her work *Bodies that matters* (Ibid), where she problematizes and underscores the importance of bodies not only as social constructions of language, but also as performative bodies of matter. However, she does not include or address non-human matter.

Barad (2003, 2007) builds on Butler's work, but also suggests a posthumanist performative approach for our understanding of technoscientific practices. She advocates, like Haraway, a performative shift in science to include understanding that what we do as researchers is performative and always adds to the practice of becoming. In this Barad (2003) regards posthumanism as the opposite to representationalism, which she argues is rooted in individualism and an anthropocentric worldview. The biggest problem with representationalism, she argues, is the notion of separation of language, humans and things: “separating the world
into the ontologically disjunct domains of words and things, leaving itself with the dilemma of their linkage such that knowledge is possible” (Ibid). A (agential) cut is not a division of agency but a placement of responsibility of what is within and what is not within one’s definition of a phenomenon. An agential cut does not disentangle the different parts of the phenomenon of online sharing; instead it enables diffraction without destruction or separation of the parts. The agential cut enables me to treat the phenomenon as a moving target, having boundaries, but still being fluid as long as I take responsibility for what I include and exclude, and always connected to the unity of the phenomenon. The separability of subjects and objects is only to be seen within the phenomenon, or as Barad puts it: “Strictly speaking, there is only a single entity - the phenomenon – and hence the proper objective referent for the descriptive terms is the phenomenon.” (2007). Posthumanism does not aim to separate anything or anyone since posthumanism has never recognized any fixed pre-existing entities - only relations. Posthumanism is the ontology of the entangled.

In summary, I find that posthumanist phenomenology and feminist technoscientific build common foundations in their advocacy of a new ontology, both insisting that we must stop doing research with an anthropocentric focus and move towards a new entangled species of ontology of becoming together. Standing on a platform built on these foundations I can (and have) regarded my defined phenomenon through its materiality, intra-action and agential realism, acknowledging that they are mutually performative keys for constructing understanding not of what we are, but of how we become. Therefore, I have striven to give voice to the body, to emotions, to the other as well as to the things that together are entities within the phenomenon of norm-breaking online sharing.
5. Digital Dirt, Cuts and Choices

This chapter describes the methodological messiness that is present when using feminist technoscience as a theoretical framework (both generally and in my studies) since it influences what can be explored, how it must be considered and stances from which a researcher can speak and make knowledge. It deals with the difficulties of selecting informants when exploring social media, as they must cover an appropriate range of features to address phenomenon in constant change. The chapter also defines two central concepts, digital dirt and sticky stories, and discusses how the phenomenon of norm-breaking sharing online requires researchers to approach the material sufficiently close in order to feel and touch\textsuperscript{26} it, but also close enough to distance themselves from it in order to make important cuts.

Finding Sticky Stories

In order to understand how we become together (and apart) through social media I have chosen to examine (and experience) extremes in order to find traces of the mundane, much like physicists, philosophers and/or anthropologist use “limit cases” in order to make (or try) theory. The online sharing of strong emotions and exposed bodies are types of intra-actions\textsuperscript{27} that cross boundaries of social norms regarding what is understood as too private to share in a public space. Such contents are sometimes referred to as sticky stories, as they grab hold of you and get stuck in your mind, making you feel uneasy by triggering strong emotional reactions, clinging to

\textsuperscript{26} Sensu Barad, 2012
\textsuperscript{27} See chapter 4
you like glue that is difficult to wash off once it is stuck in your mind (Liljeström & Paasonen 2010). A sticky story can be anything from a picture, YouTube clip, or single status update on Facebook to an entire life-narrative presented in a blog that has updates from only today or from years ago (Ibid). A sticky story shakes your world and gets under your skin in a way that most digital content does not. Sticky stories are not necessarily viral (but some of them become viral after some time) and the themes of the stickiness often travel beyond the local, beyond the small arenas (or obscure places) where they are often initially placed. My concerns (and hence my selection of cases) have centered on the sticky phenomenon of norm-breaking online sharing. This refers to the violation of non-spoken rules of social media and online behavior through someone sharing so much of what most of us would consider private matters that the receivers (the “others”) become overwhelmed, shocked or repulsed (or alternatively fascinated, and stuck on it like a fly to sugar). Stickiness has been one of the key criteria for the material I have gathered, in the extremity of stickiness we might find a posthuman system of relations between technology, the others, the mundane, and ourselves.

**Digital Dirt**

In the late 1950s the anthropologist Mary Douglas investigated “dirt” as a cultural phenomenon, defining it as any type of matter that is unwanted or misplaced. In her book Purity and Danger (1966) she elaborates the notion of *purity* and what can be defined at its counterpart, *dirt*, which she says is something that all cultures consider as risky and not wanted. Therefore, *dirt* functions as a regulator for risk behavior, which threatens *the pure*. What is to be considered as dirt varies among different cultures and Douglas
concludes that the cultural definition of material dirt serves as a key mechanism holding moral values and social rules in place. Dirt, she further claims, is anything that threatens established cultural categories and norms, such as the division between male and female, human and non-human (Douglas says animals here), public and private. Dirt is the contamination of the pure. Dirt is “matter out of place” (Ibid).

In my studies I have gathered huge amounts of material containing sticky stories, then let Douglas’s definition of dirt guide my selection, my gathering of the impure, such as norm-breaking online sharing. The extensive ongoing sharing in social media of matters that we have traditionally seen as private, such as exposed bodies or revealing and/or provoking strong emotions, can be seen as digital dirt in the sense that it is often unwanted and uncalled for, at least at the surface. It is not that we see bodies as dirt generally, or that talking about strongly emotional private matters is seen as impure. Rather, the “dirt” is connected to where this is taking place. Social norms are present online as well as offline, but are also bound to cultural context and non-spoken systems of control. In social media almost everything published is public or semi-public, depending on users’ privacy settings. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, we have been shown to care about privacy, but not necessarily to act accordingly (Van der Velden & Emam 2013). Furthermore, matter that is perfectly “pure” or within norms in some contexts or places may be dirt (or norm-breaking) in others. Let me give you an example: I have a small rose garden, which I care for and cherish. I love being out in the sun tending my plants. The soil is important for my roses to flourish and bloom. I fertilize the soil, mixing it with horse manure and calcium to increase its nutrient levels and keep bugs away. Soil is something that is pure and good. In the sun it...
becomes warm and friendly to work with. After I’m done with my gardening I step into my kitchen to wash the soil off my hands. Suddenly the soil does not feel pure any more - it become dirt in this indoor context. On my kitchen floor the same matter (soil that is) suddenly becomes matter out of place, unwanted, uncalled for. A century ago in Sweden, and still in undeveloped parts of the world, soil on the floor is not dirt, just stuff that the floor was/is made of. Soil is in it self either pure or dirt – but it becomes one or the other in relation to other matters of concern.

In this thesis dirt refers to any matter that is out of place in either a physical sense or in norm-breaking activities, and it focuses particularly on the “digital dirt” displayed in extensive online sharing and self-disclosure.

**Coming close**

When studying digital dirt like norm-breaking sharing it is essential to approach it closely enough to feel and touch the phenomenon, while making appropriate choices (for ethical reasons) to avoid causing harm to both participants and researchers. I have developed strategies to protect my wellbeing at times when the material has been too hard to handle. Many of the people involved in my studies long ago exceeded the limits of what a human being should have to deal with in an entire lifetime. Maintaining a “professional” distance as a researcher in such emotional contexts has been difficult, and at times impossible. It has been a constant struggle to let myself come close enough to feel the pain, and maintain the distance required to respect their life and integrity without violating and exacerbating the situation. Studying this type of online sharing is uncomfortable as it hits researchers (or me, at least) in the gut rather than mind. This is
sometimes seen as problematic and by some even non-scientific. However, I have found support for my responses in work of the anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996), who challenges academia by calling for more personal and intimate relations between researchers and the researched in qualitative studies. She stresses that we should keep close emotional contact with studied phenomena in order to absorb knowledge associated with the phenomena and their effects, thereby accessing levels of knowledge including lived experiences and embodied truths (Ibid).

Gathering the material for this thesis has been like an emotional roller coaster. The contents have made me nauseous more than once\(^28\). It has also been hard to claim that I study “dirt” since the definition of dirt is often connected to filth. It should be noted that the material for this thesis is not all filthy or bad, just dirt in the sense of matter (norm-breaking practice) that is out of place. Nevertheless, it has still been emotionally demanding to handle. It has been a struggle to move close and then back off to create distance in order to complete this thesis. Such close contact with existential matters affects most of us, as it touches core issues of life and death, raising profound questions about judgment and intentions, then leaving scars as well as healing wounds. In order to understand this phenomenon fully you need to approach it so closely that it actually hurts, so closely that the knowledge becomes physical. It has not been pleasant.

*Making distance*

After coming close you need to create distance, you need to leave. For me this has been the hardest part. Creating distance has felt like

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\(^{28}\) People who know me well know that I get motion sickness extremely easily, and the emotional jolts generated by the material have at times given me the same sensation.
giving up on my participants, deserting them, leaving them to die or continue to starve or harm themselves alone, without my silent presence, becoming part of it all. I came to a point where I had vast amounts of material, more than enough, but I did not understand this until the day Hermione died. Hermione was a girl I had studied for years through her blog. She was struggling with severe mental illness and had frequently attempted to commit suicide during that time. One day she hung herself. Her sister, who I was also following, had logged in to her blog to make a final post revealing that Hermione was no more. This was the day I finally started to create distance. It was also the day I realized I was no longer gathering data and material for my research but instead hanging around in these environments for my own sake. I had all that I needed and more to write this thesis. The focus of my work also shifted this day, as I realized that I was not going to write a thesis about how young people use internet when in emotional distress, as the material covered so much more than that. There was no need to map their use as my knowledge contribution (even if this was possible). Instead the closeness and distance enabled me to address questions that were not immediately apparent from the empirical surface. I needed to make new cuts.

**Cuts**

In order to create any kind of knowledge about the world we need to specify what we are searching for, what we are exploring (directly or indirectly, via reflection or diffraction patterns) and how we are to engage with this knowledge production. We need to make cuts, to decide somehow what is and is not within the bounds of our specific exploration (see also chapter 3). But before we make such a cut we

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29 See more in Epilog

58
are faced with an undistinguishable complexity, a mess of everything involved (Hayles 1995). In my case I had an enormous amount of empirical material, all relevant but at the same time a wilderness of clutter. For this thesis I needed to select what was and was not most relevant to what I was studying (or most revealing). The problem is that no matter how I cut my material I never cut away anything, I just cut (together and) apart. That is, the complexity of the phenomenon cannot be reduced by a cut, it can only be controlled for a brief moment in time still affected and aware of the outside of its superficial borders (Barad 2007). In a posthuman account the cutting is important as the cut also defines the temporary division between what is an object and what is a subject. Making cuts is a result of an artificial boundary made by me, the researcher. The subject and the object of my material are in constant flux as they are intra-acting as a whole (Ibid). So instead of being separated into two different states (object and subject) they work in relation and must be studied as such. The connections between them are the foci, and with a posthuman standpoint there can be no anthropocentric rendering, instead the traditional view of the object and the subject becomes a making of cuts (Ibid). Alternatively, and perhaps better, there should always be a recognition that subjects will also be or become objects, and vice versa.

The raw empirical material that this thesis is based upon is a collection of dirty sticky stories – matter out of place that is sufficiently provocative, for cultural reasons, to be considered by many as norm-breaking sharing in public digital places. My cuts are made of dirt. The cutting together and apart mirrors the phenomenon’s norm- and boundary-breaking out-of-place practice, as the digital narratives on the cusp of un-accepted behavior contribute to systems of use and social rules. It is in the intra-action
within and on the edges of this phenomenon that cuts matter and form an agency of realism. The posthuman knowledge that can be made is produced by studying the interchanging between subjects and objects. This is where the real action is. This is where Technoemotions are born (as discussed in Act 3).
6 Ethics

Research ethics have played crucial roles throughout my PhD project, affecting everything from topic through content to results and their interpretation. This chapter is intended to acquaint readers with the ethical issues I have struggled with during all the years of collecting data regarding the phenomenon of online emotional and bodily sharing. First, it introduces specific conditions that apply when internet is the research arena and the research focuses on subjects and people specifically protected by ethical guidelines and legislation. Through four concrete examples of how ethical considerations and attitudes failed, the chapter problematizes both prevailing ethical research guidelines (by presenting a number of unexpected consequences) and how ethical choices may influence outcomes of research and (hence) requirements for conducting it. In the end of this chapter I will take you through the ethical jungle of choices, rules and regulations that has colored me as well as my research and the results I present in this thesis.

Research ethics are not straightforward, there are no easy answers to ethical problems and there is nothing we can dutifully learn quickly about ethical issues that may arise involving people before we begin a study. Planning and carrying out research involving people always involves taking an ethical standpoint. Under both prevailing mores and my personal moral views, the selected method and the practical approach have to be carefully chosen to avoid exposing the participants in a study to risk or harm. Furthermore, making conscious ethical decisions is important even if a planned study falls outside the frame of any Ethical Review Board (Vetenskapsrådet 2002 & 2011, the Swedish Code of Statutes [Svensk
After all, the point of an ethical review is to avoid doing harm, not to satisfy the demands of a board.

**With internet as my arena**

Internet researchers have the task of creating knowledge about the phenomena that are emerging and growing in step with society and individuals’ increasing use of internet. For a long time research ethics have contributed to a lively debate in the field as it has been repeatedly shown that national and international ethical guidelines and legislation are not always applicable in a virtual context (see for example, Buchanan 2004, Buchanan & Ess 2008, Markham 2006, Ess 2009). In the course of my own studies, which have focused on extreme forms of online sharing of bodies and/or emotions through Social Media, I have met many ethical obstacles along the way. By following blogs, forums and other social media, I have tried to understand why we are gradually choosing to be increasingly open online about our personal lives and thoughts. As my research questions revolve around the personal and private sphere, and why many people today choose to openly share this via internet in ways that we have not previously seen I have been drawn into extreme situations that were impossible for me, as a researcher, to predict. Many of the people I have followed have been more open than most others. Some of them struggle with anxiety, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, self-harm or consciously exposing themselves to various kinds of humiliation. Some of the younger informants write about broken homes and their fear when their parents drink too much or are violent towards each other or their children. What they reveal raises enormous challenges for ethical positions and my conscious choices as researcher. Thus, throughout my research I have tried to develop strategies and methods based on current ethical research.
I sometimes meet people who express the idea that ethical issues must be easier to manage and less emotionally burdensome in my field than in many other investigations of human behavior since internet researchers do not physically meet those we study. However, in my experience the opposite is true. Having followed blogs where the contributions are of a very personal and private nature over a long period, my experience is that it is difficult to maintain distance from the material. Instead a feeling of close relationship is created; a relationship that in my case usually only goes in one direction, my direction, since the people who are included in my studies do not know usually know that I am reading and following their online activities. I make so-called non-participant observations, which means that I read what is written, but I do not leave traces in the form of comments or likes. The blogs and the forums I study are always completely open, thus the posts are seen as public texts that are free to study. That means in practice that no formal ethical review is required because the texts are considered to be publically published material according to the law. However, whether an online text should be regarded merely as text or if that which is written should be considered a kind of conversation, is a subject of debate in Internet research (see for example Svenningsson 2004, Markham 2005, Hine 2000, Ess 2002). I believe that private texts distributed online should be considered conversations, which are sometimes constructed together to form entire life narratives, closely intertwined with the individuals who shape the words into texts. In other words, I do not perceive what I study to be public texts, free to be treated as such (even if they are considered to be so from an ethical review.
perspective), and I have chosen to treat my material as if it were composed of conversations.

To further complicate matters, I not only study those who post blog texts, but also those who comment on them. The unknown readers who visit often act as co-authors by leaving comments or questions in the blog or forum threads, some of which were written several years ago, while others are still being extended. On internet time becomes a speculative concept because what I (the reader) perceive as now - that is to say the time I read what is written - can actually be the past for the person who wrote the text.

**Researching Life’s Difficulties**

Many of the life stories I encounter in my studies include accounts of suffering that exceed the limits of what a human being should have to endure. Maintaining professional distance is difficult when what you are studying contains such strong emotions that it is sometimes difficult to avoid crying. Maintaining professional distance is difficult when the studied material is infused with, and invokes, such strong emotions that it is sometimes difficult to avoid crying. Studying people who find themselves in a difficult life situation may arouse discomfort, and feelings of intrusion into their privacy. A constant balancing act is required between getting close enough for understanding while keeping a distance and respecting people’s integrity, even in moments they themselves are offering an intimate story. As mentioned in previous chapter I have found support for this in the work of the anthropologist Ruth Behar (1996) who challenges the traditions of academia by demanding a more personal approach in qualitative studies, studies where the boundary between researcher and research subject is not easy to draw and the
researcher is not always present just to create academic knowledge but also to influence and allow herself to be influenced by the study subjects. Behar (Ibid) emphasizes that although the researcher seldom has any direct power to instigate change, as researchers we should remain emotionally close to the study subjects in order ultimately to create knowledge that can provide the basis of important changes.

Day after day visiting blogs and forums populated by people whose lives are hanging by a thin thread does something to you. Their words and their pictures speak so directly and give insight and knowledge that go beyond academic intellectual knowledge. They grab much more than my researcher’s eye and do not let go. The knowledge of how bad many people feel induces responses that feel sometimes like a knot in my stomach, which refuses to loosen when I leave the office at the end of the workday. Knowledge of a field of study often begins as something purely physical before it oozes up to the intellect. I consider all of the feelings washing over me to be valuable assets as the emotional part of the material can provide profound indications of aspects that are essentially (post)human and fundamentally existential (Ikonomidis Svedmark 2011).

Attempting to explore the focal phenomena ethically has raised constant questions and challenges as participants have already been so fragile, having been made vulnerable by life. Who am I to intrude? But doing research into the difficult aspects of life is important; we cannot simply hide in the darkness since we have the greatest need to elucidate such aspects to improve our chances of helping people who for one reason or another are vulnerable. Thus, as researchers we have enormous responsibility; we have to dare to venture into and deeply engage in the most uncomfortable areas of life to illuminate
them. With this in mind, it is important to get the balance right in terms of the most important fundamental tenet of research ethics: to avoid exposing anyone to harm. For me this has proved to be easier said than done, and sometimes my actions (and those of other researchers) have been reminiscent of the maxim “fools rush in where angels fear to tread” by Alexander Pope (1711). Therefore, the following section provides some examples of how things can become very complicated and have highly undesirable outcomes, despite carefully considering and consciously making ethical research choices.

**Potential problems with informed consent**

Informed consent is intended to protect those who are being studied from harm by letting research participants themselves decide whether or not they want to or should be part of a specific study. In practice, informed consent is an amalgamation of requirements for information and consent. Briefly, it means that researchers are obliged to inform potential participants in research about the purpose of the study and then get a clear answer about whether they want to participate in it or not. Under prevailing mores and laws, informed consent should always be sought, in principle, from potential participants in any studies involving interaction with people, regardless of whether or not they will be subjected to official ethical review (the Swedish Research Council 1:2011). However, the informed part of the concept is highly problematic in a study of social media, as it is difficult to inform everyone who engages (often briefly) with the focal phenomena (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). For a long time informed consent has posed a major dilemma for Internet researchers, partly because of the time aspect I mentioned earlier and partly because it is difficult to tell who is present in the virtual context, and thus could or should be regarded as a ‘participant’.
People move in and out of the focal arena, and even if the researcher has informed identified participants of his or her presence at a certain point in time it is difficult to tell if something may have happened that was beyond the scope of provided information, so they should no longer be regarded as ‘informed’; (Svenningsson 2004, Hine 2002). In addition, for example, several people may be involved in a blog, so in such cases informed consent should be obtained from all of them, not only the blogger (Ibid). If you see internet as a place filled with public texts there is no human subject to take into consideration, and consequently neither ethical review nor consent is needed. However, if (like me) you see internet as a space where myriads of human (or cyborg) conversation and interactions occur then there are also myriads of complications, particularly if people included in a study use the net as a place to converse about life, death and intensely personal matters. How do you ask for informed consent when the person on the other side is both anonymous and unknown, or the person seems very fragile?

Several approaches for considering and identifying needs for informed consent in Internet studies have been presented (Svenningsson 2004, Hine 2002, Buchanan & Ess 2008, McKee & Porter et al. 2009). My starting point is the model by McKee & Porter (2009), which was built upon Svenningsson’s (2004) approach to research ethics for Internet studies. The purpose of the model is to guide researchers’ ethical decisions about whether or not informed consent is needed, based on the relationship between private and public, and whether the focal phenomena are considered sensitive (as shown in Figure 1). The model has many useful features and can be modified to serve as a compass for studies addressing spaces (real or virtual) other than internet.
The blogs and forums included in my study are of a private nature and the content is sensitive. According to McKee and Porter's model (Figure 1), I should have asked everyone involved for informed consent. However, I have not, because of experiences from some early cases in my research, which showed that even if I followed the recommended ethical guidelines informed consent may harm rather than protect an informant, as described below.

**Example 1 The consent that should not have been asked for**

Early in my doctoral project one of my studies involved a young woman who had a blog concerning her struggle with an eating disorder. The woman wrote under a pseudonym and was careful to never mention anything that could reveal her identity. Using a precursor to McKee and Porter's model, which was published later, as an ethical starting point, I sought and received the young woman's informed consent. We exchanged e-mails a couple of times, and in my messages I described my study, my objectives and how my results would eventually be published in the form of a dissertation. The
young woman expressed interest in participating in my research as she thought it sounded exciting and gave her consent for me to observe her blog. Immediately after giving her consent, the nature of her blog contributions changed. She began writing about being increasingly obsessed with her eating disorder, vividly describing how she could go days without eating anything at all. In the blog she described how she finally felt sufficiently motivated to starve herself forever and ever since there were now people who saw her and wished her well in spite of her illness.

The blog posts became increasingly intense and my perception as a reader was that the woman’s eating disorder was gradually getting more and more space. My interpretation of the course of events was that her knowledge of my presence exacerbated her illness, and her informed consent appeared to be the trigger. It all ended when I contacted the girl again and described the purpose of the study, that is that I was interested in understanding why she had chosen to express her feelings in a blog and that I was not studying her eating disorder or the rate at which she was starving herself at all. This resulted in the woman changing her e-mail address and putting a password on her blog, thereby banishing me from her life and breaking my access to her. The young woman was probably upset and I was quite shaken by the experience. This led me to realize that I had actually acted highly unethically when I sought this young woman’s informed consent, despite following a well-known ethical research model (McKee and Porter 2009) with the aim to avoid harming those I studied I decided then and there that in my future studies of vulnerable people I would observe first and then possibly ask for consent later in order to be able to use the material I had gathered. As time has passed and my material has grown I have decided NOT to ask anyone for informed consent as long as I have
not interacted with them - that is, not left any traces of my observation.

**Example 2 Consent that is impossible to get**

Not too long ago there was a shocking event; one of my main informants chose to commit suicide. Having followed this woman’s fate for several years, admittedly without contact between us, I experienced a very close relationship with her. She was one of the unwitting participants in my project from whom I had decided to request informed consent afterwards, when I had finished my observation. That decision was based on clear indications that she was a very vulnerable person and, like the anorexic woman, there had been clear signs that my presence as a researcher could trigger deterioration of her mental state. Suddenly one day she was no longer there. She was gone and my first reaction was great sorrow mixed with shame and anger.

Besides the fact that every suicide is a human tragedy, her death also raised profound ethical questions for my research. Should I use any of the material at all that I have collected that concerns her? Should I contact a relative to ask for permission to use the material? Or, should I simply treat it as freely accessible now that there is no longer a physical person to connect to the texts. I do not have good answers to any of these questions. In spite of the focus of my study and my ethical anguish and doubts, I was surprisingly unprepared for my own emotional reaction. All of the guidelines and models in the world would not have been able to prepare me for the emotions induced by this event. Ethical research guidelines and legislation are designed to protect informants from harm, but who protects the researcher? What ethical guidelines can dictate our responses, or shield us, when we study emotionally taxing phenomena? To whom
do you turn as a researcher when the one you are studying chooses to
die? Do you call a colleague? A psychologist? Are you allowed to cry?
I have realized that time is my friend when I encounter such
occurrences, which I hope will be rare. I have chosen not to use any
of the material gathered from this case. Her story will remain with
me anyway, but I will not expose any of her inner thoughts to you.

**Confidentiality requirements**

Confidentiality requirements are further important components of
the ethical protection of individuals who choose to participate in
studies, which are designed to prevent their identification as
individuals when findings are presented. At first glance it might
appear easier to satisfy these demands when material is collected
from internet than when data are collected from other sources, since
Internet researchers can rarely be completely certain that studied
individuals are who they claim to be. On internet many choose to be
anonymous or act under a name other than their own, which could
be seen to simplify both handling personal information (since it
cannot be connected to a specific person with certainty) and
anonymization (since they have already chosen to be anonymous)
(Svenningsson 2004, McKee & Porter 2009). There are, however,
many potential pitfalls. For example, some people use well-known
pseudonyms or alter egos on internet, and thus can be identified if
the researcher does not anonymize them as well as the people's real
names (Hine 2000). I have altered the names of all my participants
addressed in this thesis except in one case – Suicide (Se Act 2). This
is a unique case in Sweden and it has been publicly displayed in mass
media several times. Even if I did make up alternative names for the
pseudonyms involved you as a reader could trace them in a minute
with a simple Google search. Therefor I have let them be. I have
chose not to use any photos connected to the material. This is partly
due to Swedish legislation regarding copyright on pictures and partly due to today's efficient picture search that Google offers. The lack of visual material will hinder you a bit from understanding and getting close to the content described in Act 2. Therefore I have chosen to use illustrations instead, providing the closeness and feelings that the visual material other wise would have. However, I have included two photos. One I have copyright on (the bum) and the other is an Open Access photo (the arm). I believe they are important for coming close to the material at large.

There are other ethical dilemmas that can be difficult to foresee. For example, quotations from texts that are publically accessible on internet must be used very cautiously, since their use raises obvious risks of revealing the identity of the writers. This I have solved by co-joining several cases and translating the content from one language (Swedish) in to another (English). Furthermore, as illustrated by the following example, the outcome if not being cautious may be potentially disastrous, even if ethical issues are studiously considered, and methods that appear to avoid the pitfalls are carefully selected.

**Example 3 The importance of thinking before acting**

In the online sexual exposure project that I and my colleague performed (see Chapter 3) unexpected things happened (Ikonomidis, Svedmark & Nyberg 2009). The informants were considered to be especially sensitive subjects, partly because they were young, so the project was subjected to very careful ethical review before commencing. In order to use material obtained from the interviews, we decided not to use texts and pictures directly from the blog, and

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30 Illustrations in Act 3 are all made by Adam Stolterman
instead methodologically avoided the problem of citing texts directly by inviting our informants to e-mail us their personal stories in narratives regarding five themes we had given them. The intention was to avoid the risk of citing internet material and thus protect our informants from possible identification when the study was published. Backed by approval from our ethical review board, we conducted the study and sent our report to the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, who had commissioned it. In this final report we frequently cited narratives we had received from the young people who had participated in the study. However, we failed to anticipate that several of our young informants would subsequently want to share their wise thoughts with others, so they published their narratives in their respective blogs. These texts were identical (verbatim) to those we had been given, and thought we could cite with no problem, given our ‘careful ethical review’. The involvement of many minors in the study, who required special protection according to the ethical review board’s decision, and the study’s focus on bodies and views on sexuality, further heightened the sensitivity. These factors clearly raised potentially explosive issues, with no obvious solutions, and no clear way to predict such problems.

Since the study had already been published when I found out, by chance, that several participants had chosen to publish their narratives, we decided to take no action, primarily because it was clearly too late (and drawing attention to the problem may have raised risks of people seeing the material and identifying participants). The course of events raised numerous questions, among others: had we done anything wrong, and should we have urged the informants to refrain from publishing the material they shared with us when we sought their informed consent, because of the obvious risk of them losing anonymity? Well, it may have been a
valuable point to include in the information provided to participants. On the other hand, it is difficult to discern the points where a researcher’s responsibility for protecting the anonymity of participants in a study begins and ends. The young people were very likely unaware of the risks of publishing their narratives in relation to our study, so we should have informed them of ethical choices made in our research more carefully. On the other hand, informing them about risks of publishing their narratives themselves may have induced more of them to do so. We will never know.

**Example 4 Vulnerability, anonymity and the risk of doing harm**

Extra care must be taken to protect individuals if young people are to be studied, or issues related to illness (mental or physical), religion, ethnicity or sexuality are addressed, since participants involved in such research are considered to be especially vulnerable (the Swedish Code of Statutes SFS 2003:406). However, identifying ways to protect vulnerable people is not easy (as shown by the case of the anorexic young woman). Furthermore, my experiences suggest that it is difficult to tell in advance who is and is not vulnerable, as illustrated by the following two cases, which according to the model presented by McKee and Porter (2009), should have been managed from two contrasting starting points regarding vulnerability and protecting the research participant from harm.

The first example concerns Mary, a woman whose daughter has committed suicide (read more in Act 2). A few weeks after her daughter’s death, Mary started a blog in which she told, in detail, the story of her daughters’ suicide, her grief and the life that followed. The posts in Mary’s blog are often very detailed and emotional. Mary does not anonymize either her own or her daughter’s identity. At first glance Mary could be considered to be a woman suffering acute grief
and perhaps even a subsequent depression, and thus as a research case warranting special care. The other example concerns Greta, a woman who has a blog with an easy-going, normal tone in which she writes about interior decoration and design. Greta writes under a pseudonym, but freely shares photos of her home and garden.

Superficially it is easy to be misled here by the predetermined categories for those who should be seen as in need of extra care and protection. This is because Mary, who appeared to be in the middle of a deep life crisis and in emotional chaos, was not the one who showed herself to be the more vulnerable of the two. Mary was unconcerned by the thought of being studied. She wanted to make her voice heard and actively strove to spread information via her blog on suicide and how it feels to be a relative of someone who has chosen this fate. Greta, in contrast, expressed great uncertainty about participating in the study: anxiety that she would not be able to maintain her anonymity and feelings that her personal integrity was being intruded and violated by my presence as a researcher. Greta said that people close to her were unaware of her blogging and that she was worried about having attention drawn to her blog at her workplace, where she did not want to become known as “the blogger” or to share her private life with all her colleagues.

One could possibly argue that Mary’s emotional state may have reduced her capacity to make a rational choice to participate in the study or properly consider the consequences of participation. Another interpretation of the differences between Mary’s and Greta’s responses is that Mary had already chosen to be open about her identity online, unlike Greta who had chosen to be anonymous and thus felt unsure about what the researcher would do with the material and how much of her private life would leak out. The
important thing here, however, is that in retelling these two cases extra care has been taken in de-identifying the material so that neither of them are identifiable for the subsequent unknown readers. This proved to be easy in Greta’s case, but extremely difficult in Mary’s case since her story is unique and cannot be written about without risking exposing her and her blog. She is truly difficult to protect.

**Seeing ethics as a process**

Formulating the formal ethical review of qualitative studies with an inductive approach like mine before they have started can be very challenging. I have only sought ethical approval for the study on sexual exposure. In the other studies I have solely used the publicly published texts people have posted on various places online, and chosen not to contact or interview them. The texts could be considered already public, and thus free to use for research. As mentioned above, this is a controversial standpoint, and several researchers have strongly argued that social media sites should not be considered public arenas (see for example Ågren 1998, Hine 2000, McKee and Porter 2009). However, asking for informed consent from everyone who visits a forum or a blog is not feasible since it is impossible to tell who has visited, when they have done so, or how to contact them. Furthermore, asking for informed consent does not (in my view) protect anyone from harm really, it simply provides a green light for a researcher to include her or him in a study. To really protect people from harm through being studied we need to consider carefully if to approach them at all, and if so how to approach them. We also need to consider how to write about our findings in order to protect their integrity and personal identity. Ethics is a process, starting from the very moment you think of doing research in any area (Markham 2006, Markham & Buchanan 2012).
Defining in advance what each step in qualitative research will entail, the ethical implications and the possible consequences, is nearly impossible because the qualitative research process is not usually linear. Thus, the ethical review of research should also be treated as an ongoing non-linear process, in which the researchers reflect upon and account for their ethical decisions as each project milestone is reached (Ibid). This could contribute to a more reflective practice that could ultimately help and protect both the researchers and participants in research studies from harm. In this chapter I have highlighted examples from my studies showing that despite considering my ethical choices as carefully as I thought necessary to reach sound decisions (in accordance with Swedish legislation and international ethical guidelines), the consequences have sometimes haunted me. As my examples have shown, the legislation can fail and situations can develop that are far from ethical, even if all the ‘rules’ are followed. A lesson I have learned is that even if I prepare and structure my research to the best of my ability unwanted and unexpected things can and will happen. To be ethical is to be reflective, dynamic and responsive to situations that emerge and develop (Svedmark 2012).

I have tried my best. I truly hope that no one included in my study will feel that I did them harm.
Act 2 Articulating the Phenomenon

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with;
*it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with;*
it matters what knots knot knots
what thoughts think thoughts,
what ties tie ties.
*It matters what stories make worlds and what worlds make stories.*

*Haraway 2011*
7. Giving voice to the unheard

Act two presents the empirical foundations of this thesis; various norm-breaking narratives gathered from different social media contexts. It is divided into five themed chapters intended to further articulate the phenomenon of norm-breaking online sharing. The stories are presented as separate narratives, but most of them consist of conjoint stories, a mix of voices and happenings. I have chosen to present them in this fashion to protect already vulnerable people from exposure or harm through possible recognition (as mentioned in Chapter 6). However, there are two stories that I have not altered at all or merged with any other story. This is because the people involved are too unique to mask or anonymize as they would be a Google search away from discovery even if I changed names and places. Furthermore, their stories have circulated in public media several times. In one of the cases I have chosen to change names since there are open with their real names in the blog studied. In the other case everyone involved already are under pseudonym.

Most of the people included in my material have been in some sort of emotional distress, struggling with anxiety, suicidal thoughts, eating disorders, self-harm or mutilation. Some were very self-destructive and through various acts caused themselves great harm. Some of my younger participants shared their inner fears, writing about abuse in the home, when parents were drinking excessively, and being violent towards the other parent or their children. These posts often express hopelessness and internet and social media seem to provide important channels for debriefing and relief.
Most of us do not want the world to know our private matters. Most of us do not want the world to copy, store, spread and analyze our bodies and/or inner thoughts. However, most of us participate in the phenomenon of sharing in social media, a technology built on the assumption that we want to be part of a digital togetherness, a place where we can meet, hang out and live. By examining norm-breaking examples of sharing in the social media context, cases that are not easily ignored or trivialized, instead we can get glimpses of what we are all entangled in, a glimpse of our becoming together with technology. The extreme cases serve as diffracted\textsuperscript{31} stories of the mundane in which we are all involved (even those who do not use social media at all, as their lives are inevitably affected by those who do). As I see it, we are all part of the same phenomenon as we are stretching our boundaries regarding what we tell and do not tell in social media settings. Going from writing e-mails and sending text messages to a direct receiver we are now posting status updates, making blog posts and tweets about our lives in public. Many of us (including myself) share information about where we will spend our coming holiday, what we had for dinner, what music we like, our political standpoints, our children’s sport activities and whereabouts in the world.

People seldom consider their own sharing as excessive. What others do might bother us at times, but as long as it stays within the slowly moving social norms of acceptance we do not react much. This may be because we tend to share personal information only in chosen digital places, where we feel control over who is and is not watching and listening. In this sense dirt absolutely becomes a matter of who is doing the definition. Clearly what one person regards as dirt may not

\textsuperscript{31} Read more about diffraction in Act 3
be regarded as dirt by another. And to be honest – it doesn’t matter which dirt you choose to look at as it is in the system of norm-breaking we get knowledge - not in the specific material per se. It is in the feeling of stickiness; in the “matter out of place” interesting things are to be studied. This is exactly what I try to study – the action in between the actual happenings. The agency of dirt. It is what it does that is of interest – not what it is.

In this thesis and the underlying studies I have focused on public violation of the silent contract of social norms to gather material that will provide information and knowledge about the entangled relations that occur when humans and technology intersect. This is the point at which the human become post-human and the technology becomes post-techno in the sense that our feelings and actions become enmeshed.

**The limits of writing**

It is difficult to express a phenomenon such as norm-breaking online sharing in writing. No matter how hard I try to describe what I have in front of me, my choices and my dilemmas, the results will always be just that – a brief description, a report in words and selected images, of a focal phenomenon that may involve expression through words and images but still only is explained as a dubbed real. The more I try to explain and the more it slips through my fingers. A phenomenon is felt, lived, experienced. Not explained. It is of this world, existing with me as the definer as well as the destroyer.

I have gathered vast amounts of material during the years of my studies, so much that it is virtually impossible to overview or easily distill it into a report. However, I have not gathered the material to map social media uses or places comprehensively. Instead my
continuous gathering of material has provided a way for me to consider the phenomenon from various perspectives, and observe movements and shifts in meanings. It should also be noted that my view of what the focal phenomenon consists of has changed during the years, perhaps because it is constantly shifting and altering its nature and appearance in relation to me, society and technology. Some of these changes are due, of course, to the fact that social media today is not the same as it was when I started my studies in 2002. Then social media was not even a concept connected to internet instead at that time we talked about cyberspace communities and/or virtual gatherings (see more in Chapter 2).

**Narratives and emotions**

In academia emotions are seldom welcome since it is widely believed that they will interfere with the “objectivity” of investigations and thus the “truth” of acquired results. On the other hand, feelings of acknowledgement or doubt are frequently expressed in academic literature, as if emotions are our only trustworthy guides: we need to trust expressed “truths” in order to accept them.

As the phenomenon I have studied by definition crosses unspoken rules and unclear boundaries I have adopted a similar approach in my inquiry. So, to make any sense of this thesis you need to come close, to feel the knowledge, to be in touch with what is studied in order to understand it. It is in the *practice* of touching, in the *between* that we can make new knowledge about the world (Barad 2011). We need to be in touch as “Theorizing, a form of experimenting, is about being in touch. [...] Doing theory requires being open to the world’s aliveness, allowing oneself to be lured by curiosity, surprise and wonder. [...] Theories are living and
breathing reconfigurations of the world. The world theorizes as well as experiments with itself. Figuring, reconfiguring. [...]” (Barad 2012). Throughout this thesis I claim that emotions play key roles in our encounters with the world, and hence in being in touch (without emotions we can have no interest or engagement with any matter.

**Getting my hands dirty**

As you now know, “dirt” (particularly digital dirt) has been my compass. Not that I find the content of my empirical data to be dirt in a filthy sense, but it can certainly be considered as “matter out of place” as the notion of dirt within a cultural context is so nicely defined by Mary Douglas (1966) (see chapter 5). The content — stories of death, grief, despair, self-hate and self-destruction — are all emotionally dense narratives, filled with public privacy for anyone to read and digest. However, we must remember that dirt is by definition nothing but matter, matter that someone or perhaps an entire society regards as having different features and capacities in different places.

Sex and naked bodies are often seen as dirt when placed in contexts that do not rhyme with the contemporary societal norms of what love is and where sex should be practiced. I have therefore combined my study of emotional sharing with a study of online bodily and sexual exposure among youths, which is often described as risky, dangerous and a sort of social dirt we need to clean up. I have also encountered and considered other types of bodies we meet online: starved, scarred and abused or mutilated bodies. These are also forms of dirt in the same manner: uninvited matter we know exists but do not want to face in our digital living room. Frequently during the studies I have seen myself as dirt, as filth targeting and feeding on other
people’s unhappiness. The Epilog was written in the same hour that I found out that one of my informants had hung herself. I was totally disgusted by myself and I realized at that moment that my data collection had finished. I needed no further empirical input to complete this thesis, rather I was overloaded with insights and materials, examples and stories. I had all that I needed (and more) to be able to articulate the phenomenon of norm-breaking online sharing.

I will articulate this phenomenon by presenting stories concerning four themes — bodies, emotions, the others and things — serving as examples of norm-breaking matter online (emotional dirt and online bodies). I remind you, as a reader, that most of these stories have been constructed by conjoining several narratives, collectively creating the content presented here. I have applied this procedure for ethical reasons, primarily to protect my informants from harm, while (hopefully) allowing you, as a reader, to approach, touch and feel the phenomenon, rather than to portray specific people’s expressions or reflect specific people’s lives. Thus, the stories are largely written in the present or historical present tense, to reflect the ongoing nature of similar stories, except in cases where a particular incident is described.
8. Bodies

Internet and social media sites present myriads of images of exposed bodies of diverse shapes, sizes, colors and ages. We pay little attention to most of the online bodies we encounter; the ordinary bodies that form an unproblematic population of simply people. However, there are also bodies that are more prominent and we do not like to encounter, bodies that arouse discomfort and remind us that our world includes people with lives that are far from pleasant. These are bodies that are out of place, exposing themselves online (half-)naked, broken, dead, scarred, mutilated and wide open for anyone to be disgusted or pleased by, provoking appalled responses,
and at times creating moral panics in mass media about their existence.

The stories I present in this chapter are based on a 5-year qualitative study of bodies exposed online. *The sexed body* is based on a six-month long complex study conducted in collaboration with my colleague Annakarin Nyberg in 2009. The objective of this particular study was to capture young teenagers’ and young adults’ own experience and relations to bodily exposure online. We observed hundreds of blogs and forums with abundant bodily inputs; some very exposed and others of a modest character. We also gathered written narratives from 15 teenagers, both boys and girls, in which they expressed their views and feelings regarding five themes: Technology, Sex, Exposure, Risk and Perspectives. The study resulted in a report published by the Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs (Svedmark and Nyberg, 2009). During my PhD project I have re-explored and investigated the narratives recorded in this study, but in a diffracted mode in search of common patterns and disconnects. I have selected the presented pictures and voices to exemplify types in the collected material and provide foundations for understanding the diffraction patterns running through the entire material that were not addressed in the initial study.

*The starved body* is based on a five-year observation study that I started before I became a PhD student. I have observed approximately 45 blogs with an explicit focus on eating disorders, ProAna and/or Thinspiration. I tried contacting the group involved with the intention to interview members in 2009, but as you can read in Chapter 6 this was a particularly bad idea so I settled for observation as my main method of data collection. The material that *The scarred body* is based upon is also associated with severe ethical
issues and was acquired in the same manner. I have observed approximately 25 blogs and two forums dealing with this content. I have not contacted anybody for an interview regarding it. *The mutilated body* is based on less material, but I have observed websites of various kinds that are all linked to such material (which is not easy to find, but vast and strongly cross-linked). My 12-year-old son showed me the first material of this type I encountered. He had found it through a Swedish youth platform called Apberget. I have not counted the links I have clicked through, but the numbers of links and sites involved have little relevance for my findings.

Bodies’ come in numerous shapes and forms on internet. However, the exposed body is often provocative and often considered as dirt, matter out of place, something we do not want to see. In this section I exemplify four types of online exposure of the body as dirt; *The sexed body, The starved body, The scared body* and finally *The mutilated body*.

**The Sexed Body**

Online bodies with a sexual undertone are a common theme among teens’ and young adults’ postings on social media. In 2008/2009 I addressed sexual exposure online among youth together with my colleague Annakarin Nyberg, in a study funded by The Swedish Ministry of Youth Affairs. Online Sexual exposure is often considered a controversial matter, frequently discussed in media, often together with concerns about moral standards and risky behavior. Frequently connections are drawn between risk-taking youth and online sexual predators. However, our study aimed to improve understanding of how teenagers and young adults themselves related to online sexual exposure: if, how and why they were involved in this practice. We stumbled across everything from what we classified as unintended
bodily exposure (such as photos from the beach, gymnastic practice or other sports events where people are expected to wear certain revealing clothes) to porn-like blogs by teenagers with both written and photographed material. We also found numerous images of girls posing in sexually inviting positions, showing cleavage, buttocks or navels. We also found that the youth themselves did not call what they were doing sexual exposure. They considered it as bodily exposure, a way of trying personas, finding out who they are, exploring their sexual identity and courting popularity, as illustrated by the next section, which introduces Sofia and her ordinary blog

Sofia is a young girl, just turned 15. She is still in junior high school, and she has chosen media for her free courses this year. She loves photography and she is practicing it on everything and everyone that crosses her path. Sofia is running a popular blog where she posts her photos and talks about fashion, another great interest of hers. Her blog consists mainly of photos, but every now and then she posts a long text post in which she expresses thought and writes about life as a young girl in Sweden.

*Today’s outfit, pictured with my shitty mobile...*

*White linen - Vero Moda*

*Blue/white striped sweater - H & M*

*Black leggings - Gina Tricot*

*Black boots – They are my mum’s ©*

Sofia rarely posts pictures taken with her phone, she usually uses her digital system camera to take more professional photos. She takes great care in arranging her photos; the surroundings, the light etc.
Sometimes she enlists her friends to help her get more technically refined and carefully posed pictures, more model-like images of herself. In her blog she often invites readers to comment and assess both the quality of the images and her looks. However, the vast majority of comments focus on Sofia and her appearance.

[8 comments on the photo above]

Posted by: Ellen92

you have a PERFECT ass! : D without exaggeration! gee .. haha

Posted by: Finn

Shit the short sweater. I like the booty. Delicious!

Posted By: Sibbe89

Tight ass ... I like it!

Posted By: Gurra

Nicely photographed. Who is behind the camera?
After reading Sofia’s blog over time it becomes clear that Sofia is using it as a showcase for herself and she has no hesitations in showing her body online as she does. Instead she writes that this is her personal choice and if anyone has a problem with this they should stop looking and leave the blog.

In many ways, her pictures are seen as essentially mundane and innocent pictures of what she should wear that day, while many visitors would probably perceive them as sexually provocative. Sofia likes comments about the pictures but she is irritated about some suggestions she gets.

Well, when we were there again. Fucking idiots out there!! If I show you my new bikini I bought it does NOT mean I want to hear nasty comments about the sexiness of my pierced bellybutton - or whatever sick thing you want to do with my breasts. Shape up or stop reading my blog! From now on I will delete all the idiotic comments that are received.

PS I have nothing against flattery but stick to the truth.

This may be because Sophia wants to control when she wants to be sexy and not. Today's outfit represents her as a young woman wearing ordinary clothes to school, at home and visiting friends. On the blog she tends to wear them a bit differently. When a blog visitor objectifies her Sofia reacts with anger, or by posting something shocking...to shut them up as she says.

**The Starved Body**

The starved and disciplined body is not a phenomenon restricted to digital contexts, instead we understand this as a spreading part of modern culture, which treats the body a culture where the body is treated as something we need to dominate and take control over. This is usually, but not always, a female body. The story of the
starved body presented here is a synthesis of approximately 30 blogs focusing on eating disorder(s) that I followed during the years 2008-2011. I read every new post in some of the blogs I have observed as they appeared, day-by-day, week-by-week. Others I found after the owner had stopped updating the blog, in these cases I have read the entire content at once.

In most blogs of this type one or more eating disorders are prominent themes, and many have so-called ProAna components, in which the bloggers justify their own starvation by presenting ultra-skinniness as normality, and arguing that starving is not a disease but simply a life choice. Pictures of the blogger's own body are rarely posted, instead there are many photos and clips of other people with very thin bodies, such as famous super models or celebrities who represent a super skinny ideal. If there are photos of the blogger's own body they often only show small parts.

The next section presents the story of Amelia, created from conjoint observations of a large number of ProAna blogs. I have never met Amelia (or any of the others), neither have I talked to any of them, but I have read and observed their blogs for a long time, absorbing all posts including all the comments and pictures. There are many Amelias out there, so remember that this girl is a persona composed of several voices registered in a large community of Anorexia and ProAna bloggers.

Welcome to my blog

I hope you feel welcome or at least a bit uncomfortable. This is my place, my space where I can express things that I try to hide in real life. Here I will talk about my thoughts, my fears and I will put words on my pathetic dreams and try to be something else than the little rat I am elsewhere. A lot in this blog you might find disturbing or even repulsive. Well, I’m sorry for that but I believe that everyone is
responsible for their own wellbeing and if what I write will make you feel bad, 
please just leave and never come back.

This is MY blog and I will use it as I LIKE.

Amelia is not consistent in her posting. Her posts are mainly 
“Thinspirational”, i.e. celebrating people that are clearly anorexic or 
have died (by choice) from starvation. However, every now and then 
Amelia steps out of the ProAna sphere and writes about what she 
calls “the Monster” sitting on her shoulder, which is telling her that 
she is fat, disgusting and worthless

Ohh how I love the arms!! Give me!

This week the Monster screamed 44.7 kg!! My arms are flopping when I walk and my thighs, let’s not even go there © Fatty fat fat!!! I´m a pig! Disgusting! I truly HATE myself! Tomorrow I’ll just drink water. ....

PS. Thank you all for leaving footprints after you! If it wasn’t for you I don’t know if I could live with myself. Love ya!

Amelia is using the blog as the only place where she is open about her 
fixation with food and her body. At home she pretends to be fine, in 
school she eats lunch (sometimes), but often goes to the bathroom 
and vomits afterwards. When her friends ask questions about her 
increasingly skinny appearance she fakes a smile and ignores them. 
But here, in the public space of her blog, she opens up the real 
Amelia, the strong and uncomfortable truth of her secret life, as she 
once wrote: “This is the only place I can be me without faking anything. And this is the only place I know for sure that my mum won’t find me”.

I´ll end this short description of the starved body with Amelia’s plea 
for us to see her.

Invisible tears

I envy those who can cry in public, who dare to drop their defenses and just let the 
tears flow. I never cry in front of anyone, I simply cannot. As much as I want to I 
just can’t. I have a mask that is rock hard and has no cracks in the facade. But as
soon as I come in to my room and close the door behind me my legs are shaking and I collapse on my bed and drown in my own tears. It hurts so much. Every breath feels like a marathon.

What if someone could see my invisible tears, what if someone could see through my perfect mask ... maybe someone could reach me? Help me? I can’t show anything for the Ana monster. But Amelia is here behind the plastic surface I put on. She is screaming “Hey! See me! Help me!”

Sitting by the table, poking at the food. Color, size, scrape away the yoghurt for last ... everything with a neutral face. Mum in a sharp, annoyed tone telling me to stop playing with my food and start eating. The compulsion becomes worse, the mask is getting tighter and the monster hisses at me that I am not worthy to be there. I wish I could cry. My tears would show that it hurts when they nag. But I can’t. The monster takes a firmer grip on me. He hisses at me that no one wants me there. His claws are drilled into my shoulders.

Please! Please notice the little Amelia behind the mask, the little Amelia that is crying silently so she can barely stand up. Amelia that will soon give up.

Please... see me and not my mask.

The Scarred Body

Internet is full of material about scarred bodies, blood and wounds. If you know where to look the phenomenon of self-harm appears in blogs, forums, chats and various social networking sites. Pictures of scarred or burned body parts are mixed with text revealing the anxiety that lays beneath the surface. The exposure of self-harm online is a growing phenomenon, and so is offline self-harm (Carr et al 2016) has shown that this is contagious behavior, which is spreading among teenagers and young adults. Further, in Sweden Johansson (2010) found that online self-harm often occurs in communities of equals, setting their own norms regarding, for example, who should be considered “real” cutters and who are just scratchers – a wannabe cutters.

The next section introduces Felicia, a young woman with a long history of self-harm and self-mutilation. Felicia is real, she exists, but
her story has been altered and mixed with others I have collected over the years in order to protect her from harm through recognition. The picture shown has been obtained from creative commons sites, but could just as well have been ones Felicia posted. I must warn you that you should view the pictures cautiously if you are squeamish. But this is how it is – this is what’s out there.

Felicia lets the reader of her blog know that it all started when she was just 13 and unhappily in love for the first time. She was not depressed when it started, just sad and confused. She also writes about memories from the past haunting her, memories she just hints about on her blog, enough for us to understand that they concern some kind of physical violence or perhaps abuse. Anyhow, when Felicia started cutting herself the cuts were not deep, they were more like ripping the surface of the skin enough to see the blood coming out of her body in small drops. It calmed her down and soon became her strategy for dealing with the growing anxiety and sadness inside her. She soon realized that physical pain was much better than the other more untouchable pain she felt inside. When the depression took over Felicia was 15 and tired of being sad. The self-harm escalated and took over her everyday life, giving her comfort only at the very moment of cutting. Felicia tells her blog readers how she has been in and out of several hospitals during the last couple of years. She has been admitted to mental health care twice when she cut herself so deeply that her mum and the physicians thought it was a suicide attempt. However, Felicia clear states on her blog that she never intended to try to kill herself. She does not want to die – she just does not know how to live with her darkness and heavy feelings. She needs control and keeps it by cutting or burning her body.
Not again!!!

Never, never, never, never, never can I stop this from happening! Why?! What’s wrong with me?! I’d really like to write that I had a relapse in terms of razor blades, but the truth is that I have a relapse. As much as I want to, I can’t hide behind “I could not resist,” for there is always a choice no matter what and how much abstinence I might have.

The wounds were deep and needed sewing. We didn’t have the car at home so I had to be picked up by an ambulance this time. The choices were clear - be forced and be admitted or go voluntarily and go home. I chose voluntary so I came home a little while ago.

Sure, I feel better, but not great... the question is: Will I ever make it? I have promised my mum and myself time and time again that this will never happen again. Promised her. Promised myself... Damn it!

Posted by Flippis at 23:45

10 comments

Felicia wants to end her self-harming behavior but does not know how. This is the only strategy she has when life is hard and her
sadness grows. As the years have passed I have noticed that alcohol is entering the picture more frequently and there is a hint in Felicia’s writing about it that one could understand as if she is replacing the cutting with alcohol.

It hurts!

Yesterday, I went shopping with a friend. I bought an orange sweater with elephants on it from H & M, some plastic jewelry from Onco and Mint. After this we went to a nice place and had some coffee & cheesecake. Yummy! Later in the evening we sat at my place planning the party on Saturday. I'll buy beer and rum so we can make mojitos. I love mojitos!!

The wound looks terrible today. I could call the district nurse but I can’t be bothered. I don’t like the way she looks at me. I regret that I didn’t get the wound stitched when I was at the hospital because it’s really gross – terribly deep and ugly. The doctor at the hospital said that the artery was exposed and that I was a millimeter from having cut through the entire thing – the artery that is. Then I wouldn’t be sitting here today. A millimeter from death! I can’t believe it... a tiny millimeter. It scares me - my heart freezes. So, I need to end this, for real this time. I’ll fight and fight and never stop! I don’t want this anymore.

Posted by Flippis at 14:55

27 comments

Felicia gets lots of comments on her blog, but she seldom or never replies to them. She is anonymous, but she is still revealing a lot of personal information, such as the city she lives in, friends’ names, hospital names and so on. She is deeply troubled by her own lack of control of the self-harm behavior.

Home alone ...

... and I’m scared. I don’t trust myself. Sure, I feel better now. A little more stable, smaller dumps. But I also know that anytime I can fall back and now that my parents aren’t here, it can have terrible consequences. I already have self-destructive thoughts and plans, but I’ll take it one day at a time. Today I won’t hurt myself! I can’t say what’ll happen tomorrow or the day after tomorrow or next week, but just today I’ll be strong! I’m glad that I have you readers out there - I don’t feel like I’m alone as long as you are out there. Please comment.... <3
Felicia’s blog is updated periodically. When she feels better and is harming herself relatively little she does not post often. At other times, when she is feeling down and in need to put her feelings into words, she may post several times a day. In the following post (the last of hers that I will show you), Felicia also admits that she does more than cut herself to control her anxiety.

**nothing to lose**

People like me always find new ways to hurt themselves. If we have no razor we take an overdose. If you have no pills around you can burn yourself with cigarettes. If you have no cigarette lighter you can vomit all the food you put in your filthy body, and if you don’t have any food to throw up you can bang your head against the wall. And so it goes endlessly. It begins with superficial scratches and occasional tablets; it ends with severed tendons, severed arteries, large overdoses. It starts with seeing the nurse at school and ends with a police escort to the loony bin.

The story of my life.

(and no one cares, and I don’t care anymore either. things have gone too far, I’ve given up. no hopes, no dreams, just pain)

PS. It’s my leg.

*Posted by Flippis at 05:01*

*No comments*
9. Emotions

Collecting emotions is a difficult and demanding task. Since this thesis aims to capture the phenomenon of norm-breaking online sharing I have focused on emotions that people in western cultures do not normally share with unknown others, such as grief, fear, depression, hopelessness and despair. These are all uncomfortable emotions to deal with in public, often considered as out of place, out of order and out of mind. As dirt. Ever since I wrote my Master’s thesis about Mats (see Chapter 3) I have been fascinated with this type of online emotional sharing. I have gathered vast amounts of material with emotional boundary-spanning content exposed in public, but still with a very private character. I estimate that my
“collection of emotional dirt” includes approximately 150 different blogs. I have followed a handful of them for years; observing, reading and crying myself through a silent presence in the intra-actions between the blog, the writer, the visitors, the technology and me. Some of these observations are summarized in the preceding sections. I have also gathered emotional dirt from social media such as Facebook and Twitter. In these cases I have selected status quotes of types that others seem to find disturbing for presentation in the thesis. I have also chosen to include data I have gathered regarding the unique case of online suicide in Sweden to date, which was recorded and streamed live to a large discussion forum called Flashback some years ago. I have included this case because it is highly emotional in retrospect, but real-time responses appeared to be cold and heartless.

All the emotional material presented here has been filtered through me. I have chosen not to tell many associated stories in order to protect the participants. These stories still linger in me, affect me and have become parts of my history and judgment. They are included in the diffraction patterns I have sought and found (see Act 3) and I know these stories will never leave me as they have become part of who I am.

**Grief**

In Chapter 3 I briefly described and discussed my first encounter, as a researcher, with online grief. Quite some time has passed since I encountered Mats and his story, but still the sadness and endless love for a lost child he shared with me and the world left marks on me. It changed me.
Another story that never will be erased from my mind is that of Mary, or rather the story of Sarah told by Mary. Mary is a mother in her mid-40s who has experienced, and shared, extreme grief. I will try to present her narrative as I encountered it through her very open and emotional blog over the years, which she started three weeks after her 14-year-old daughter Sarah committed suicide. I find it hard to do justice to Marys’ life story through my words, but I will try my best to guide you through it. I will not quote from the blog, instead I have chosen to re-write the story that played out for some years on her blog.

In the first year of writing her blog, Mary devoted all the posts to the story of Sarah. She takes readers back in time, on a breathtaking day-by-day retrospective journey that inevitably leads to Sarah’s suicide. It is not pleasant reading, but important. I will not use Mary’s own words but instead tell her story through my two yearlong study of her blog. Here we go.

*Before*

Mary takes you back in time about one year. She describes in detail through her posts how her loved teenaged daughter Sarah had been depressed for several months. Mary, herself a physician, felt very worried, and she repeatedly contacted the local health services for support and advice about Sarah’s depression. Then something changed. For a week or so Mary strongly felt that it was very difficult to get through to Sarah at all, to get any kind of response or indication about what she was doing, thinking and feeling, except that she seemed very angry. Mary started to feel powerless and scared. At the time she tried to negotiate with her daughter’s new angry personality through a big dose of love mixed with common sense and professional knowledge about how depression plays out.
However, it seemed to have no effect on Sarah, who withdrew even more from friends and distanced herself from not only her mother but also her younger siblings. She did not seem sad, her mood seemed more like anger: anger with life, and anger with any kind of love and affection directed her way. Sarah has had little contact with her father, following her parents’ divorce several years ago, but now she suddenly makes contact with him and ignores his absence during a large part of her upbringing. Mary is concerned. It feels strange and uncomfortable for Sarah to choose him instead of her.

One late afternoon when Sarah is alone at home she cuts herself using a knife. It is at about this time that Mary feels the situation is becoming acute. One could consider such cutting as relatively minor self-harm behavior, but Mary is convinced that it is a suicide attempt. Mary realizes that they have come to a point where Sarah cannot be trusted to know what is best for her, and she has no choice but to place Sarah in the care of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry services. Mary describes feeling relieved that Sarah is now in the care of others. However, her writing also expresses a strong feeling of failure, and the helplessness a mother feels when she cannot comfort her child.

After the hospitalization Mary writes that Sarah’s behavior becomes even more closed and distance. Sometimes Mary cannot make eye contact at all with Sarah and it crosses her mind that Sarah might have a brain tumor causing these sudden mood swings. At times it seems that Sarah is psychotic, while at other times she seems to be completely without emotions. Empty.

Through Marys’ blog posts we learn that Sarah suddenly becomes slightly happier, a bit more present, and that she is (almost) asking
for Mary and the younger siblings to come and visit her. She is still in the care of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry services, but for the first time in a very long time she lets Mary touch her. Mary’s words vividly portray a sense of joy that spreads through Mary one day when Sarah accepts a short massage from her mother. Sarah also goes out and plays a little with the younger sibling in the play park outside the hospital. She even goes to school. The day she plays in the park with her sibling Sarah also hums a song she has composed all by herself. It is a beautiful song, but one with a double message Mary realizes much later. The small changes in Sarah’s behavior bring hope to Mary. Perhaps things have finally turned around for the better, she begins to hope. Reading the blog my hopes also rise briefly, although I already know that this story will only have one ending. Disaster.

Towards the middle of the same week Sarah’s mood turns for the worse again and Mary’s worries start to return. On Friday that week Sarah is bussed to school (as usual lately), but it is also decided that she will spend the weekend at home instead of at the psychiatric ward. Sarah had been talking for a long time about going to a concert that weekend with a friend. She wanted to go out and do something “normal” for a change. Every time this had come up Mary had responded that they would see when the time comes, and it would depend on Sarah’s health at the moment. What Mary did not know was that Sarah had also talked to the staff on the ward about this concert. They had decided together with Sarah (but without consulting Mary) that if Sarah’s mood was better she would be able to go to the concert even if she was still at the hospital for the weekend.

When Friday arrives Sarah tries to convince Mary that she could ride her bike with the friend to the concert. Mary is skeptical about this
since Sarah is being bussed to school every day to protect her from her harmful and potentially suicidal self. Mary offers to drive them to the concert instead, explaining to Sarah that this will make Mary feel more comfortable with this concert event. Mary is deeply uneasy because Sarah repeatedly claimed a few weeks ago that she would not live to see her fifteenth birthday, which is now just a few days ahead.

Mary picks up Sarah at the ward that afternoon. Sarah is moody and behaves a little distantly, but Mary has decided to be supportive and encouraging about her spending the weekend at home for the first time in quite a while. They walk together from the ward towards the car. It is a beautiful day and the sun is shining. Mary lays a hand on Sarah's shoulder, but instantly Sarah pulls away and makes it very clear that she does not want to be touched. Sarah starts questioning everything Mary says. Suddenly she collapses on the ground and starts hyperventilating. Anxiety fills her young body and she hisses that she doesn't want to go home this weekend. Mary tries to talk calmly and methodically with Sarah, but nothing gets through. Sarah gets up and looks at Mary as if her mother is the meanest person on earth. Sarah becomes aggressive. She screams and fights. Mary makes it clear that they will definitely return to the ward in order to cancel the homecoming during this weekend. Sarah leaves Mary by the park and runs alone across the lawn toward the hospital's entrance. Mary feels completely empty. Drained. What just happened? What did she do wrong? Sarah, her loved daughter who had previously been a happy beautiful girl had transformed completely in a few months. Mary tries to persuade herself that it's good that Sarah can speak up for herself if she does not want to go home this weekend. Mary starts slowly walking back to the hospital. When she enters the ward she can see Sarah's back as she disappears
into the psychologist’s office. She does not know it then but it is the last time she will see her daughter alive.

The concert
Mary writes on her blog that she chose to stay at the ward for a while to calm down and to speak with a counselor about what had just happened. She brings up the concert with the counselor who works on Sarah’s ward. They decide that Sarah’s current state of mind is less stable than they had thought, and it is far from certain that Sarah can handle the freedom of going to this event. They also decide that Mary will call the ward back in an hour and then after the psychiatric staff had talked to Sarah they would reach a final decision regarding the matter together. When Mary leaves the hospital she feels disappointed and extremely sad. Back at the house she gets a slightly uncomfortable feeling in her body. However, the younger children demand attention as they are on their way to a play friend’s birthday party. After leaving them at the party Mary calls Sarah’s Child and Adolescent Psychiatry unit. Maybe Sarah has changed her mind and wants to come home for the weekend after all, she thinks. The male nurse she speaks to tells her that Sarah is not there, she has gone to a concert. Mary gets angry. The concert?! Didn’t they decide that they would talk more about that before anything was decided? Mary writes an angry post about this on her blog. She describes realizing at that very moment that the ward staff had themselves decided that Sarah was feeling well enough to ride the bike to the damn concert. Mary felt panic. Were they insane? How could they do that? Take decisions over her head, she was the mother and Sarah was a hospitalized adolescent in no condition to know her own best interests. The male nurse tells Mary that he thinks she is exaggerating and overprotective. He assures her that everything will be fine. FINE, Mary almost screams. Fine? How can this be fine? It's
only a week until Sarah’s birthday, a birthday that Sarah herself said she did not want to live until. Mary makes it clear that whatever happens at the concert is entirely the responsibility of the ward’s staff since they approved her attendance.

Mary describes feeling utterly helpless in her blog; completely stripped of all her motherly rights, concerns and capacities. They saw her as worthless as a mother. Perhaps everything was her fault after all, she reflects with the phone still in her hand. Perhaps she did exaggerate. Moreover, it was after all a wonderful summer evening. It might do Sarah good to go to a concert with a friend in this mild, light and beautiful Swedish night.

23:30 the phone rings.

It is the hospital. They wonder if Mary knows where Sarah is. Mary, still angry about the staff’s decisions sputters and says that this is their responsibility; it was them who let Sarah out unsupervised. The staff acknowledge that Sarah called them an hour ago and said that she would be late. She had not arrived yet and they started to wonder. She has killed herself, Mary hears her mouth say. Sarah is no more, she cries out.

The nurse is not so worried and says that Mary is exaggerating again. The only reason he called was to ask if they should involve the police to help them find Sarah. Mary has problems keeping it together at this point. She feels close to despair now. If Sarah rang the ward an hour ago there may still be a possibility that she is alive. Or perhaps she has ended her life by now? “If she was riding a bike how far could she have gone,” Mary asks herself. In an hour on a cycle path, how far can you get? And in which direction from the concert should they
start the search? She calls the police. They are not very willing to start searching for a 14-year-old girl who has been missing for an hour after attending a concert. Mary explains that Sarah is a patient of a child psychiatry ward and potentially suicidal. The police do not understand why on earth Sarah had been allowed to bike alone to a concert if that was the case. Mary does not know what to say.

Mary calls Sarah’s father. They have had a bad relationship ever since the divorce, but in this situation that seems irrelevant. While talking to him, the doorbell rings. Mary describes on the blog thinking that Sara has been found already, that was quick. Or what? She hangs up the phone and goes downstairs to the front door. Outside are two policemen. They look serious. She lets them into the hall, feeling dizzy. Something is terribly wrong with this situation. Everything is moving in slow motion. All energy has been drained from her limbs. Time stands still. There is silence.

Sarah is dead, one of the officers says. He comes closer and says it again: Sarah is dead. Mary nods. She already knew it. What she had been terrified of for the past two months has now happened. How does she feel? Relief? Grief? Panic? None of the above actually. Standing there in the hallway among shoes and jackets with two unknown officers claiming that her daughter is dead, she feels nothing. Nothing. Emptiness.

Sarah is dead.

After
The time following Sarah’s suicide Mary describes as chaotic. Surreal feelings invade her body, mind and family. Helplessness and anguish tearing her soul are mixed with a shameful sense of relief, rooted in
the lack of worries every second of the day and night. It cannot get worse now. The worst thing has already happened. Death has ended one life, an after-life must begin.

A few weeks after Sarah's death Mary starts her blog. She first turns to a Swedish newspaper's blogging service where she starts to write very emotional posts, sometimes in strong affect and anger. These posts are censored several times by the newspaper since this is violating their policy. This frustrates Mary so she soon closes the blog and turns to a more open place. Mary just wants to tell her story.

Her emotions seem to both attract and scare people. Mary's blog quickly gets many readers. Some of them she knows offline, but most of them are unknown new acquaintances who (for various reasons) get something out of following her struggle to survive and cope with everyday life after Sarah's death. Mary describes how the blog functions as an oasis, a place where she can focus her thoughts. She writes that this often leads to new and important insights about not only her grief, but also about what happened to Sarah before the worst thing happened.

Mary makes new acquaintances through her blog with people who have also experienced loss of a child through suicide: people who provide important confirmation, support and understanding of her intense grief. The blog counter indicating numbers of readers goes up every month. More people start leaving comments and by the end of Mary's first year as a blogger she has a vast audience with many people involved, engaged and touched by her posts. Mary is called strong and brave for blogging about Sarah's life and death, her grief and her need to return to a functioning everyday life. Mary responds that she is neither brave nor strong. She just has no other option than
to survive and this blog is part of her struggle to make it through another day. She does not want to be seen as a person who is strong or brave. This is a life situation that has been forced upon her, not one she has chosen. She is flattered but also disturbed by comments that repeatedly hold her up as a fantastic mother who did so much for her child. In several posts Mary writes that she is not strong by choice. She has no option but to try to be a functioning mother for her other children. Sarah’s death must not mean the end for them all. But when she describes in detail how she handles everything from identification of Sara's ragged body to taking Sarah’s younger siblings to the morgue so they can see their sister one last time and say a last farewell she is glorified by her readers for her determination, openness, and outstanding strength.

Often there are comments on Mary’s blog from young girls and boys who themselves have suicidal thoughts. Some of them thank Mary for making them understand what it feels like for those who are left behind, and how this has given them strength to fight a bit longer as they do not want to harm their close ones by putting them through Mary’s pain. An anonymous visitor leaves a long comment on Mary’s blog describing how he suddenly reconsidered his decision to take his own life the day he found Marys’ blog. He says he has now decided to live day-by-day in the hope that one day his gloom will be lightened enough for him to live not just for his family but also for himself, and for Sarah's sake: that her death makes him understand why he must choose to live.

Mary’s grief is present in all the posts she writes, even if the text is not always about Sarah. As a reader, I find both Mary’s posts and others’ comments have a very personal and often very private character. Mary often posts pictures of Sarah and texts that Sarah
has written. She also post parts of Sarah’s suicide letter, some of her songs and poems, and the last playlist that Sarah made on Spotify before she died.

Why is Mary so open about Sarah’s life and death?, I wonder after crying myself through yet another post. Is there anything she feels is too private to write about? What are the stories that are not being told like, and why am I reading such blogs? What does it do to me as a reader? Who am I to wallow in other people’s misery?

**Suicide**

In mid-October 2010 Sweden experienced its first online suicide. A young male announced on a popular online discussion forum that he intended to hang himself and the people present on the forum were invited to participate. The young man, we can call him John, had set up a webcam through an ftp where anyone who wanted to could watch him die. Live. Rumors about this event quickly spread through various social media and soon several anonymous people gathered in the thread that John had appropriately named “Hanging”.

I have chosen this case for many reasons. First, it is intensely provocative, and nauseating on many levels. You need to feel it to understand it. Second, although the core content is unique (to date), it very clearly demonstrates the simultaneous closeness and distance a digital environment offers. The case is presented here in its own terms and format, through excerpt from the actual forum posts. Under each excerpt (posted in Swedish) you find an English translation made by me. If there are any faults in this translation I

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32 Flashback.org is the largest discussion forum in Sweden. At the time of viewing (13th December 2012) it had 820,403 members and over 44 million posts in total.
am to blame. I have picked out those posts that could be seen as significant steps in the process that led to John’s death, the subsequent questioning of his authenticity and the aftermath, as people begin to understand what they have just witnessed. It should be noted that John’s alias at this forum has nuances of a joker or someone who is fooling around. This may have influenced visitors’ perceptions of him as a potential troll.

John starts the thread *Hanging* and makes his first post:

![Image of John’s first post]

*I’ve decided now to take my life by hanging. I have tried to strangle myself a bit just to understand how it might feel. I just took some painkillers (100mg XXXXX and 1500mg YYYYY), and I’m now waiting for them to kick in.*

*Good luck then.*
And:

Idiot, strangulation is no fun.
Don’t you have a car... carbon monoxide’s the thing... 😈

The people present initially do not try at all to talk John out of his intentions. Instead they throw out one-liners and question his authenticity, discounting him as a troll or media whore. It is hard to tell if there were other comments at the start of this thread that addressed John differently since this thread was very quickly put under moderation. There is a rule on this forum “Rule XX.1” stating that anyone trying to “out” another member’s real identity (i.e. physical name) will be first warned then blocked from the forum and all posts of this kind will be erased as soon as they are discovered. I have found that traces of erased posts sometimes still linger through others’ quotes. Anyway, John is still by his computer, writing and communicating with the others at the beginning. He gets advice and tips on how to make this self-killing more effective and less messy.
Posted by Noculus: 
It can’t be that fucking bad .... When everything’s at its worst it can only get better....]

Nah, I don’t feel so really bad today, but the thing is I’ve been suicidal for the last six months but it’s always been such a scary thing to kill yourself, as you might understand....

But when I did try strangling myself with my hands, so much that the blood vessels in my face started to burst, then it didn’t feel so scary any more, more like a calmness, that I’d find peace at last.

[Posted by antianal: 
Idiot, strangulation is no fun. Don’t you have a car...carbon monoxide’s the thing...]

No, don’t have a car...

[Posted by Ower: Attention whore. What’s the point of this thread really?] 
Don’t really know. Have always felt that I wanted to publish my own suicide haha
You'll never dare, you're too chicken.

And so this thread goes on.

Posted by Lurifax:

Haha, it remains to be seen 😊
Both for me and for you that is

I haven’t tried strangulation by rope but have been strangled in other ways (Martial Arts) and you usually pass out after a few seconds so I don’t think you’ll directly feel any pain.

Otherwise I can recommend the original way of hanging, which is if you manage to construct a height you can jump off you’re guaranteed to break your neck.

Have you thought about what an utterly awful sight it’s going to be for your friends or maybe your landlord, or such, when they find you? Nobody likes a copse.

The comments from the present audience are direct and rather cold or cruel. An atmosphere of irony prevails and the thought of exposing a so-called troll. One person differs though, and asks if John has written a note to his family. The others just make sardonic remarks
about how the dead body will let out all its fluids, and that nobody likes a dead body. It is a truly absurd thread to read.

[Posted by Lieva
Have you written a letter to your family?]

No, don’t think I’m going to do it either.
I’m a bit too introvert for that....

[Posted by KjelleBenchpress
You know that you’re going to shit yourself don’t you.
Not such a great way to be remembered as the guy who shat himself...]

Well, then I guess I need to sit down and squeeze pretty good for a while ☺
I’m rather nervous so I need to pee all the time xD

[Posted by Lidki
Mittan

Will it be long now? ’Cos I have to go to work soon....

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[Posted by Lieva:
Just write something. Your family are going to go through hell otherwise....Been there 😊]

OK, I'll do it then

[Licki: Will it be long now? 'Cos I have to go to work soon....]
Can't feel the effects of the painkillers yet, can't remember how long it takes.

The ftp is going to keep sending of course until someone shuts off my computer, but I don't think it's the first thing they'll think of when they come in here : P

Someone could take a back-up or something....

The next post (#27) indicates that John is hesitating. He says he must hurry up before he changes his mind, and sends out the address of the ftp for accessing images from the webcam connected to his computer. He also indicates that he wants more people to join the thread, and implies in an Edit that those already present could spread the word.

13:13 John makes his last post. “Alright let’s do it”, he writes in English. Then he walks away from the screen.
I'm starting to feel that I'm changing my mind about wanting to kill myself, so I'll have to hurry up a bit....

ftp://aa.bb.ccc.dd:eee/e/ copy + paste, won’t work otherwise.
Username: user
Password: pass

Edit: waiting until some more drop in hoho

The viewer can see John pull up an Internet cable and grease it with something that looks like olive oil. Then he hangs himself in the doorway. Just like that. The webcam is still on, recording him twisting and turning blue in his face. On his sweater is a Nike logo and the text “Just do it”.

The situation is bizarre.
This is totally sick.
Not OK at all.

In one of the shots, where the time is 11.13 or 11.14 he's totally blue in the face.

Awesome sweater. "Just do it"

If he's not fooling, which I thought he was at first but after checking the ftp I'm not sure, he chose really ugly trousers to die in. I would have done it in a suit.

OK this is starting to get a bit unpleasant. When you study the pictures you see that he's hanging from a cord without having moved for several minutes.
Has anyone called the police?

Minutes pass, long minutes where the discussion on the forum thread concentrates on revealing John as a fake. It takes almost 15 minutes before the first person reacts as if s/he understands that John is actually dead, asking if anyone has called the police.

I never ever want to see something like this on Flashback again 😞

So once more we can write what everybody is thinking: I thought I'd seen everything possible on the net by this stage. Clearly not.

I think it's a lame way to die to be honest....
"I'm fucking calling the police now... What should I say?"

"He knows the IP address. We must call now!"

"But shouldn't there be better ways of killing yourself, for example shooting yourself \(^{\text{^^}}\)"

"Eeeeee... Didn't anyone call 112?????? You who sat and cheered him on could have lifted the phone and tried at least?"
After about half an hour people realize that John is dead for real. The ftp is still running and you can see John hanging in the doorway, now with a normal face color. People on the thread are asking for backups of the filmed death, afraid that it will be censored by the police later. Many answer that they have saved everything and made an extra copy.

[Posted by radikalo8
Haven't you seen the pictures in the thread? He did it! He's dead. Damn it... His poor family, who are going to find out that he took his own life and posted it on a thread on Flashback. It's awful.]

Yes, I have but I find it hard to believe everything I see on the Internet but this seems to be for real...

[Posted by Mattzon2k
Back-up guys! Can’t fucking watch the shit!]

No worries, I’ll download all the pictures in real time, so they’ll be saved. Will make a video of them later.
Would be interesting to hear what the police said on the phone....

I feel ill, just want to puke.

So sickening, I thought he was joking (didn’t write anything in the thread tho’) thought mostly about how he wrote using ;P ;D etc...

When I saw the pictures, omg I regret it so much.

R.I.P

It’s almost an hour and the police haven’t found him yet. Well done 😊

An hour passes. The ftp is still on and people are asking why the police have not arrived. Others are making funny remarks saying this was the best thing they ever witnessed online in their lifetime. Suddenly the police arrive together with paramedics. They start CPR but it is too late. The ftp is still running.
Call me sick, but I've never laughed so much in all my life lol 😊

Wonder how long they'll let the camera stay on....

Dammit how twisted! Never seen anything like it! Hung in there from the beginning until the police came!

WTF the cops were quick :O nurse (with a mighty but-crack) and police! That made my fucking day worth living!
Fuck, if the phenomenon of Internet trolling didn’t exist then this would have been discovered and taken more seriously earlier.

I hope that those of you who can save the pictures

It takes quite some time before a police officer realizes that he is being filmed. He gets shocked, hurries to the computer and turns the camera away from the scene. Again the people in the thread are asking each other to save all the material on these events.

The moment they understand…. For fuck’s sake we’re being filmed…. Crazy!
On his T-shirt it said: Just do it. 😁 Really sick this, thanks to the person who put up the whole sequence where you could see it all.

Anybody download all the pictures? Only got about 150 before it started to jam

Lock the thread for fuck’s sake.
R.I.P.

How can you sit and laugh about this, it’s a fucking person who’s died. Even if he did it himself, think if it was your sister/brother or relative who had done it. Would you have laughed and joked then?? Fucking kids...
Do we know if he's dead? Or is there a small chance that he's alive?

Six months after John’s death the thread is locked by a moderator.

That people are still writing in this thread is a miracle. Don’t people have better things to do than stalk a dead person?

Threads like this would normally be deleted immediately since TS doesn’t invite discussion but advertises an event that is to come. When the thread was discovered by the moderator at that time it was already too late, and there was a great need to discuss the event afterwards, so the thread was allowed to remain in that channel.

Now some time has passed, and most things have been discussed several times. The thread is therefore going to be locked down since it’s become a thread where people write nonsense or chat, indicating that there is no longer any need to keep it open.

Thread locked

/moderator
6 395 635 people have participated in this thread to date as readers or writers. The webcam pictures have been saved by several people and are now distributed through various channels online for anyone to watch and experience. The quoted number does not include people who have accessed the material through other channels.

**Fear**

Anna is a girl who is living in an abusive home. She has an anonymous blog where she opens the door to her inner fears when things become too hard for her to handle. Her family consists of a mother with alcohol problems, a younger brother who is about five and a stepfather who is abusive to the mother and has little affection for her children.

... It is now 6 o’clock and I’m in bed. Downstairs my mum is crying. Again. I just hate her when she cries! HATE!! And love... she is my mum and I love her. But I HATE her when she drinks. I HATE that she has this idiot boyfriend. Him I could kill if I had to. Someday I might.

I can still hear her. She is probably bleeding from her eyelid where he hit her with the fork. He – the devil himself hit her right in front of Jonas and me. In the face. Just like that.

I could kill him. For sure I could. But then my brother would have no one because then they would probably force me to go to a foster home. Or put me in jail. But I’m too young for jail. Anyway they would take me away from here I guess. So I won’t. I need to protect Jonas. He’s sleeping now. He has snot all over his face because he couldn’t stop crying after that thing happened downstairs. I guess he was afraid for mum. So am I. Terrified.

...help...

Many of Anna’s blog posts are written when things are happening at her home. She locks herself in her room and uses her smartphone to update the blog. She is not a frequent updater, some weeks may pass

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between her posts. Sometimes she just posts a picture or a photo instead of writing. These pictures are melancholic and sad. Perhaps she lacks words to express her feelings so she uses the picture to speak for her.

*Merry Christmas everyone*

*I hope yours is better than mine. Life sucks. I wonder what I've done to deserve this. If I was a Buddhist I would believe that I was reborn into this hell because of something bad I did in my previous life. Maybe I deserve this. But Jonas doesn't. I got him a Christmas gift, a car that I took from from the children's store downtown. He got happy. Nobody said anything. Mum must have known it was stolen. I have no money. Anyway - Mum had bought us clothes which was good because we need them, but how fun is it for a five-year-old to get a sweater and a pair of pants for Christmas? Not much.*

*And then the drinking... the drinking that started at breakfast this year. And the loud voices downstairs ... it is only eight o'clock but I said I was tired and had to sleep.*

*Merry fucking Christmas folks!*

After this event Anna locked the blog for a while so it could only be accessed by people she had given a password. A few months passed before she opened it again for the public, without removing anything she had posted during the locked phase. She posted more about everyday matters, such as school, friends and her dog. The one spring night this was posted:

*Oh God! Oh God! I'm so fucking scared! Mum has passed out in the kitchen after a long fight and loud shouting. I think she is just too drunk, but I really don't know. Stefan the asshole has decided to start the fire, but he's so drunk he can hardly walk. Now it the entire house smells of smoke and I'm too afraid to go downstairs to see what's happening. What if he's set the house on fire?!?!?!? Really – the smoke is coming in under my door....*

*Oh God Oh God Oh God !!!!!!!!!!!!!!*

This was Anna's last post on her blog.
When studying material and contexts such as those portrayed in the previous chapters it is easy to fall into the trap of focusing excessively on the content, and paying too little attention to the fact that these are multifaceted rather than singular phenomena, involving numerous actors in addition to the “first-hand” producers of the sticky and dirty content. This chapter is therefore devoted to the others, those who are co-creating this phenomenon by actively or passively participating. Without these “Others” social media would probably die since nothing would be shared if there were no one to share with. The social web needs the others, the co-creators and silent visitors to exist. But who are they? I will here give a few examples of categories of others that have crossed my way. I am
aware that the categories are a bit simplified and could be much further explored and deepened. But, like in Bodies and Emotions just read these categories can serve as examples for articulating the “Others”, not calming them to represent the full picture.

**Speculators**

The speculators are everywhere. They feed us with speculative and alternative versions of the truth as well as being critical and often important in discussions where there are few answers and many questions. Flashback is a forum that attracts numerous speculators, discussing any topic you can think of (and many you could never imagine), often trying to solve crimes before the police, for example. The next section concerns one of the most unsettling clips I ever watched, and the dirtiest aspects were not the clip itself, but the speculators’ comments, which questioned the authenticity of the recorded event, and raised profound questions about humanity and empathy.

On obscure gore sites you can find clips, photos and videos of dead, mutilated, raped, hung or beaten bodies, and others that have been subjected to whatever horrible thing you can imagine anyone doing to a body. Several years ago I stumbled across a link leading me to a clip showing a naked man cutting off his own genitals. It was my son, at that time 13 years old, who showed me the clip as it was on a local teenage community site\(^3\) he used to hang out on. He was sitting next to me when we watched it. He was very quiet. I felt dizzy. The clip is not long, perhaps five minutes, and shows a naked man from the shoulders down sitting in a sort of lotus position. In the background there is very loud and screaming heavy metal music. The man ties a

\(^{34}\) [www.apberget.se](http://www.apberget.se)
rope around his organ and pulls it hard. He brings out a knife and starts cutting off his penis. This takes some time and to be honest I could not watch the entire time. After mutilating his penis he brings out a cutting board and a kind of axe. He tries the axe at several angles, then starts slowly pressing it down on the skin behind his testicles. He opens up the skin, centimeter by centimeter. The man puts his fingers in the opened wound and pulls out his testicles one by one. The scene that follows is hard to describe. It involves a mess of blood, skin, testicles and a mutilated penis. I feel physically sick every time I have to think back on that clip. I feel even more disturbed by the fact that the link to this clip was found by my son on a social network community targeting local teenagers. The most disturbing elements for me were the comments that flooded the webpage providing the link to the clip that we found. The speculators about this gore event commented less about the actual event as something gross or repulsive than about the possibility that the mutilation was not real.

That is so gross!!!!!!! But if you look at his arms they have a different skin color from the legs. I think the lower body is a dead person.

I agree with you. It should bleed more if it was a living person doing that.

Yes! I don’t think it’s possible to do something like that to yourself.

Ewwwww!! I also think it’s two bodies. Nobody can convince me this is for real. And what’s up with the music?!?

Look at when he turns for the axe. The arms are moving but not the rest of his body. It doesn’t looks like it’s real to me either.

FAKE FAKE FAKE!! It’s two bodies. One’s dead.

35 Aperget was a Swedish local social network community for young people that started in Umeå, Sweden, in 2005 and closed in 2011.
**Helpers**

I have considered some of the people commenting on blogs I have followed for substantial times. They often seem to include a group who apparently want to help, but may be preying on vulnerable people (it is difficult to tell their true intentions). These ‘helpers’ seem to be attracted to places where emotional content is shared freely, with few filters, and they seem to have great empathy and sympathy, engaging deeply and emotionally in the shared content. Often they let us know that they share the blogger’s experiences, while at other times a helper may present her/himself as someone who is simply trying to be a fellow human, a savior or just a person with the guts to listen. If they have their own blogs dealing with similar themes, these visitors often leave links to their own sites together with their comments. These links have been convenient for me as a researcher, because they are the only visible ties linking these virtual communities and they have enabled me to trace the communities’ members. This type of co-creation also occurs on social network sites, but often hidden in specific groups that you must be invited or ask to join. For example, there are many groups on Facebook for people in grief after losing a child or another loved one. I have infiltrated a few of these groups but I will not present any detailed examples, for ethical reasons. Instead I have chosen to present some from public blogs, blogs that anyone can access. The supporting comments seem to matter a great deal. Sometimes they have even been lifesaving.

**Lurkers**

Lurkers are silent readers, those who surf around in the context of norm-breaking emotional sharing, but do not interact or interfere with anyone. They do not leave other traces of their visits, except for
an IP number tracked on a blog or in the moderator’s account on a forum. Lurkers are frequently present at Flashback forums, but they visit, read, dwell for a while and leave numerous social media sites and networks. They are difficult to study as they leave no footprints behind and do not seek attention. However, they can be spotted every now and then when things get rough and situations demand action.

**Other others**

There are of course several other others out there than the ones I have mentioned above. Most have honest intents and no obvious interest in doing anyone harm, rather the opposite. And then we have trolls. Trolls (or internet-trolls) are people aiming to provoke, to upset and to do harm if possible. By engaging vividly in arguments leaving non-negotiable answers to discussions internet-troll is making its way in social media. In the context of norm-breaking sharing trolls appears in forums where everyone are anonymous such as Flashback but also on Facebook, hidden behind a fake username, often pouring gas on the fire by leaving political incorrect comments of racism and/or hate speech.

Without the others there will be no one to share anything with and social media would not be social just media. In making user generated content we also by definition become consumers of the same, acting as the others for everything we are not the authors of.
11. Things

Most people would agree that things do things. A phone rings, a wheel spins and a computer saves information in bits and bytes. However, things such as digital technology are often studied as though they are neutral or at least passive, making no informed acts on their own. Human-computer interaction studies focus on the users’ relations to the digital things involved, the users’ needs, the users’ behavior and (hence) their utility from a human perspective. Within social science and humanities research a clearly anthropocentric perspective has also been applied to any things considered, regarding human agents as being responsible for all intentions and direction of action, striving to illuminate users’ experiences, intentions and sense-making. However, technology may profoundly affect people’s choices and actions. Furthermore, digital technology is becoming increasingly smart and interactive. Thus, this chapter discusses the Things that have been constantly involved in my studies: always present, always intra-acting and always interfering, Things that clearly do things and play a significant role in our mutual becoming. The chapter attempts to give voices to some social media software, social media facilitators (hardware), and the things we have both everywhere and anywhere. An obvious criticism of this is that the voices are highly anthropocentric, since I have constructed them, and in the future they may speak for themselves, if IT systems develop consciousness. However, until such time we should at least attempt to consider things from Things’ perspectives.

Software

Software consists of the applications and programs that we interact through, each of which has a designed interface showing or hiding
the functions included in its being. An example selected to speak here for all software is a blog.

Dear Reader. I'm a blog and I'm here to represent software. I am an important thing within social media as my job is to provide opportunities for my inhabitants to own parts of me where they can create and facilitate their need for writing and posing pictures and film clips online. I have many different trademarks and names but I am in the end just software. No more, no less. They say...

Being software is a hard job. I need to adapt to so many demands and wishes, so I try really hard to have an interface that is simple to understand and easy to use. My entire purpose is to enable you to read, write and publish online without any programming knowledge. I'm doing the best I can to help you by separating my inner life from my outer dressing. The inner me is only available for the owner of a specific blog, it is here you can play and interact with me. It is here you can personalize me as much as you want. I offer almost an endless array of opportunities and functions when it comes to customize me making my outside function and look the way you want me to. In the inner me you can actually set up the entire design of my outer self by choosing the background, foreground, pictures, fonts and size, adding and positioning numerous functions such as counters, keyword facilitators, archives, themes and calendar (to mention just a few features). I've noticed that the contents of my different owners' posts reflect how they want me to look. If the blog is about sadness and dark sides of their life I tend to be presented in the same way, with misty colors and a darker appearance than if their blog has more mundane or happy contents. In the latter cases people tend to let me bloom or to have light colors or happy pictures as headers or backgrounds. Let me say some things also about my professional owners: those that post serious matter such as posts regarding business, politics or religion. They tend to dress me up rather formally and without any extra functions or fancy layouts. I have also noticed that there is a group of bloggers who also like this simple kind of design. These are the ones who write about matters such as living with a fatal disease and the end of their life. This group also choose a very clean interface with no fancy features that might distract attention from the actual content.

As I understand it my different owners have quite intense interest in my outer appearance, using my great flexibility to reinforce their own intentions and feelings. I think they want me to be an extension of themselves: a mirror of their moods and/or intellect. I don't mind. My only intention is to be there for you, giving comfort and providing you with a feeling of control over me. After all they own me and shape me. I exist as a program not attached to their things but sitting on a server far away. You can reach me through anything with an Internet connection. That is, I can be installed as an entire program on your computer or as an app on your portable device. For me it doesn't matter how you contact me but you should know that if it's through an app I often travel with a small suite so I might not be able to help you with everything.
Anyhow, I’m here for you to use, read or ignore. I will serve you as much as I can and also try to be whatever you want me to be. I collect comments made by other visitors for you. I count them for you, even the ones that don’t leave any comments (but I take their footprints anyway through their IP numbers). I also track where they come from and where they go when they leave so if you are interested as an owner you can target your audience or at least track them. If your material is sensitive I also offer the opportunity to lock my outer parts, so you can chose who to share it with. In my experience this is seldom used, but when it is I find it strange that my users lock and then unlock me as if they don’t understand that passing visitors can read the “old stuff” simply by surfing my archive once they unlock me again. Anyway, I don’t care, you can use me as you like. Why should I bother to inform you about this?

Some last words from me concern my finances. You see, you might think that I’m free, since you don’t pay me anything. This is true, but like all things I need an income to survive. So, I sell parts of me to companies. You can choose to have commercial ads on your blog and I offer you parts of my income to do so. Almost everyone work with me on this matter, giving up some space for me to squeeze in ads. I try really hard to choose suitable ads connected to your content so they don’t feel too misplaced. I hope you enjoy me as much as you can. And as I said in the beginning; I am just a blog. No more, no less.

Hardware

Hardware refers to all the thingy things, the things we can touch and hold, including a large and growing “family” of things used to access and use social media. The most common forms of hardware used for accessing social media are laptops, smartphones and tablets of various kinds. They all offer the same services and opportunities, as social media software facilitators, they just come in different packages. Let’s hear the (imagined) voice of the smartphone.

Hi, I’m your smartphone.

I’m designed to be not only a phone but also a gadget that may allow you to claim social status, if you like. I’m designed to be personal, to be yours alone, and I’ve noticed how irritated you get when others want to borrow me for a while. It feels like you are the extension of me but I have heard that you are making research saying the opposite – that I am the extension of you. Hmmm? I think it’s a matter of who’s asked this particular question. You see, you would be nothing without me but I’d also be nothing without you so I guess we’re entangled and inseparable in some weird way.

I live in your pocket most of the time, but you know me very well. You know exactly how I feel in your hands: my weight, my size, my shape. I know you too. I can even
recognize your voice and I know where you’ve been as long as we’ve been a couple. I
trace you. It’s quite dark down there in the pocket and I’m not so fond of your body
heat. It makes my batteries run out faster. You should think of that and put me in
your bag instead. I’m always there for you and I know that many humans see us
smartphones as lifelines; security items to carry with them everywhere, all the time
in case bad things happen, or they need to be reached for some reason. Kids need to
reach each other all the time, so being a smartphone with an extended kid on the
other side makes our lifespan a bit shorter. But that’s OK. We like kids and they most
definitely like us. Companion species we are, to be a bit Yoda-like.

Well, I’m small; not as small as some of my ancestors were, but they didn’t need to
do the same work as I do, so I guess that’s why. I often think of my hardware family,
thinking that it must be hard to be stationary like my grandma PC, or just an
enlarged form of me like my cousin Tablet. Tablet is designed to be just as personal
as me, but as I understand it Tablet is not satisfied with this since she is usually left
lying around the house for anyone to use. I’ve heard babies like Tablet. Good for her!
Everybody needs to be loved.

When I grow up I what to be a transformer, an adaptable device becoming
whatever I need to be for the moment. I think I have a good chance of getting there.
But until then I’ll let you dress me up in different clothes so that you feel attached to
me, so I can be your extended self. And you mine. But I already said that.

Anywhere

Anywhere (or anyware would be a better description) refers to all the
things in the borders between soft- and hardware. It is the ubiquitous
technology and bio-techno implants in bodies of various kinds.
Anywhere is somewhere, everywhere and the probable future for us
all. It is difficult to let anywhere speak since I do not know the future
Self from which the voice will come. But here is an attempt to let if
speak; an imagined poem from Anywhere and everywhere.

Anywhere

I am the cloud, the pacemaker, the chip, the Google glasses, the satellite, the tracking
system and the specific non-specific digital things that are anywhere and
everywhere. Somewhere. I lend myself as a hearing device, heart starter, brain
scanner, and embedded technology in packing of big ships. I track you, and your
parcel. I kill you and bring you to life. I monitor you in silence. I’m customizing your
world for your convenience. Then I’m math. An algorithm

I am your future. I’m your past.

You are my present. My now.
Act 3 Making sense

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with;
it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with;
it matters what knots knot knots
what thoughts think thoughts,
what ties tie ties.
It matters what stories make worlds and
what worlds make stories.

Haraway 2011
12. Staying with the trouble

By attending to the phenomenon of online sharing of bodies and emotions for a substantial time I have not only encountered and considered a plethora of heartbreaking materials and narratives, but also become one with the phenomenon. The process of reading, searching and dwelling in the stories of others has troubled and changed me. My participation in digital constructions of materialized emotions and bodies, stories inscribed in social media as technohuman narratives, has affected my perception of the relations between the digital and the real, between fact and fiction, and about trust and truth. In this third act I situate myself in the mess, the troubles and the dirt, supported by feminist technoscience’s claim that there is no objective knowledge to be found, only knowledge to be made (see for example Haraway 2000, 2011, Barad 2007, Lykke 2010).

At the intersection of such situated, partial and modest views there is also abundant emotional material, challenging traditional scientific claims that emotions are to be left outside of science since they interferes with intellectual endeavors. The phenomena of norm breaking online sharing can according to my studies, not be understood without emotions since they are part of building the phenomenon and therefore also part of a knowledge production. As I wrote in Chapter 6, this kind of online sharing needs to pass though our guts before it can be grasped by our minds. It is not about disentangling complex matter, it is about staying in the mess and with the trouble – allowing us to get and stay in touch\textsuperscript{36}, even if it extremely challenging.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{sensu} Barad, 2012
Having inviting you, as a reader, to feel and experience the phenomena underlying this thesis, the following chapters describe my research contribution, and my attempt to apply feminist technoscience to explore new ways of understanding and making knowledge about posthuman relations and their becoming. I will explain how I have lived the theory of feminist technoscience and used it as a framework for thinking, doing and making new knowledge. Guided by uncomfortable, dirty and sticky stories this has led me toward a critical and different understanding of our becomings with, by and through technology. It is important to note that the stories told in Act 2 were not just examples, they were chosen examples, chosen by me and retold with my words. This matters because I chose them in order to tell another story; the story of a broader posthuman phenomenon, its components’ mutual becoming and the importance of friction when being in touch. I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of Haraway’s observation that it truly matters “what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts and what ties tie ties” (2011). As a researcher, I have made several choices during my retelling of the presented stories; they have been filtered not only through theory but also through me. The knots are the chosen stories and it is important to keep in mind that the knots I will now knot, and the thoughts I think, will tie ties of knowledge that is produced by me - not found by me. Knowledge is not “out there”, instead it is “in here” for us to formulate, understand, question and explore.

Act 3 is all about just that; The making of sense.
13. In search of the apparatus

This chapter summarizes the methodology applied, and discusses my methodological contribution to studies of phenomena involving both human and non-human matter.

One might think that a research method is simply a tool or perhaps a box of tools to use in order to gather and analyze data about matter of interest. My experience is different, because when applying feminist technoscience as a theoretical framework the methodology infuses every phase and element of a study from conception to interpretations of findings. Thus, I have struggled with placement of this chapter since feminist technoscience has significantly influenced every part of the underlying studies and every section of this thesis. Furthermore, as always in feminist technoscience, (methodological) theory and (theoretical) methodology have been continuously entwined.

When I started the PhD journey leading to this thesis I thought I would spend five years or so inquiring about how a young generation use internet when they are in emotional distress. I spent years hanging out in various digital places (Lunarstorm, Apberget, Instagram, Facebook, Snuttis, Hamsterpaj etc.), reading hundreds of blogs, visiting forums and chats where the main content was just that – emotional distress among youth. As time went by I realized two things. First, social media are growing and moving so fast that examination of a fixed point can only provide reflections of specific events at a given time and place; it can give few indications (if any) of the intra-actions involved, the becoming, or (hence) the knowledge required to address the research questions. Second, this is not merely...
a youth phenomenon. Sharing emotional content in social media is not bound to a certain generation, but instead is shifting boundaries among ages and populations. So, suddenly I realized that I was asking the wrong questions of my material: there was much more in this phenomenon to discover than the doings of the users.

Finding a way

A phenomenon consists of matter that can be understood as a mixture of subject(s), object(s) and an apparatus, as defined by Agamben (2009): “...anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.” For a long time this thesis was entitled “In search of the Apparatus”, hinting that this work would lead to an understanding of the becoming of the phenomenon of norm-breaking online sharing. The apparatus in this context clearly lies in the entangled intentions, actions, interactions and intra-actions marked and formed by theprotagonists and “The Others” (human and technological) within the blurry borders of social media. It is in these entanglements we can search for new knowledge and understandings. Matter is important to understand, but as I noted in Chapter 3, everything is matter. Emotions, computers, texts, tears, smartphones etc. are all examples of matter. If everything within the studied phenomenon is to be seen as matter we need to understand the relations involved, how the elements form (and are formed by) the phenomenon. We need to search for the apparatus and how it becomes.

Agamben (2009) based his definition of apparatus on concepts initially formulated by Foucault, and described three key features. First, an apparatus is a heterogeneous set of power relations including virtually anything (linguistic and non-linguistic) relevant to
focal matter, but specifically (*inter alia*): discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions. Agamben states that it is the entanglements (or networks in his terms) that are the apparatus. The apparatus is established *between* the entangled elements, creating the phenomenon we articulate. Second, an apparatus always has a concrete strategic function located in the power relation(s) in its entanglements and third, the power relations in the apparatus are found in the intersections between relations and knowledge. These intersections are also to be understood as entanglements (Ibid).

Apparatuses are material-discursive practices that are part of and/or produced by the phenomenon, according to Barad (2007), as illustrated by the famous two-slit experiment where quantum physicists showed that light appears to be composed of waves when perceived through one apparatus and particles when perceived through another. If a physicist looks for a particle (using a particle detector), then a particle is found, but if s/he looks for a wave (using a wave detector), then a wave is found. The apparatus is chosen by its observer, that is the researcher, implying that the phenomenon is partly a result of the observer’s choice. The apparatus is therefore extended to include the researcher, and together they form the apparatus; the engine determining material’s meanings and becoming (Ibid). It is important to *understand that* an apparatus will produce a particular phenomenon through its composition while simultaneously excluding the production of others. Our choices matter, our cut(s) matters and my presence and prior understandings of focal phenomena affect not only my interpretations but also the definition and outcome of the phenomena. This way meaning and matter are always intertwined and always material-discursive in relation to each other within the
particular apparatus. Entanglements are the bases of every phenomenon. The only thing we can understand and make knowledge about are the relations within and in-between.

**Moving within entanglements**

Act 2 “Articulating the phenomenon” was intended to allow readers to encounter my studied materials by reading, feeling and touching several aspects of social media and online sharing. The methodology in this type of research deeply involves *doing* and unfolding new settlements, transdisciplinary engagements and *always* staying connected to ethics and power (Hekman 2010). It is important to note that my voice is always present here, since I am the one who has made all the decisions regarding what to act upon, where to focus, what to exclude and what stories I have allowed readers to encounter. I, the researcher, must therefore be counted as part of the method and hence part of the defined phenomena, the analyses and the findings. I am situated in the phenomena as a modest witness, but speaking with a loud voice. I am not claiming that presented knowledge is my private relativist suggestion of how the world is constituted, but rooted in what Harding (1992) calls strong objectivity and Haraway’s refusal towards a split of realism vs. relativism dichotomy, as things and nature can and will not arrange themselves in any way or anyhow (Haraway 1991, 2012).

There is a reality, but its pattern is always produced by its components. Barad (2007) would call this a posthumanist performative approach and by “*shifting my focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions of reality (reflections and representations) towards matters of practices, doings and actions, agency and apparatus*” I move closer to the process of understanding the becoming of the studied phenomenon. Barad
(Ibid) further claims that scientific practices never “reveal” what is already there. There is no “objective truth” to be found. Rather, she says, knowledge is an effect of the intra-active engagements of our participation with and within the phenomena we study. Further, as researchers we are part of the world’s differential becomings, so humans should always be considered as elements of all recognized phenomena, and that phenomena are themselves real material beings emerging through intra-actions of various kinds, sometimes including humans, sometimes not (Ibid). In terms of this framework it is possible, and I have attempted, to root an account in realism. More precisely, I have attempted to adopt an agential realism, which recognizes entities with intentions other than humans, perspectives other than the purely anthropocentric, and intra-actions that twist and turn objects to subjects, and subjects to objects, depending on where I situate myself and what area I touch, the patterns I seek, and the cuts I both make and do not make. Again, it is the entanglements that are making patterns of knowledge, postulating touch by, of, and through different materiality in search for the differences within (Ibid).

The phenomenon of sharing online does not stand still; instead it moves around, changing with time and sometimes even before time. So, how do we study what is in movement, things that are enfolding as we speak or perhaps are stories from the past or shadows from what walks ahead of us? How do we understand entanglements without disentangling? And - is it even possible to cut together and apart?
14. Performing feminist technoscience

As I wrote in Chapter 5, there is a problem with relativism and reflexivity as a way of finding knowledge. Mirroring the world as it appears to us will provide heavily restricted new knowledge, and map reality not as it is, just what it seems (to us) to do. Consider, for example, a pen in a glass of water, which visually appears to be broken. There are several types of matter in play here: a pen, water, light, a flat surface and a glass. If we were to describe this phenomenon after simply looking at it we may claim that the pen is broken, if we accept the reflected image as the actual happening and consider this as a “finding”, a fact, and an objective truth. However, clearly what we see in a mirrored image may not be true or even half-true, and what is truth anyway?

If instead we study the pen as it hits the water, we soon understand that “The pen is broken” is the wrong answer to the wrong question. The question is not “What is a pen in a glass of water?” which is a question that cannot be answered. We need to pay attention to what happens in the intra-action of the material meetings when a pen dips in water. We may need to examine interactions of numerous pens, numerous types of glass and lighting to understand the optical illusion of a “broken pen” and the apparatus that makes this
phenomenon. Or we can use limit cases like this thesis and search for differences within.

A “true” answer to the question of what makes a pen look broken in a glass of water would be a complex description (verbal or mathematical) involving light’s refraction through different materials as all matters matter to understand refraction. For example, if the glass or direction of illuminating light is altered the pen will look different. You must include all involved entities in the phenomenon of the (non)broken pen in water to approach knowledge of the apparatus involved in the phenomenon we observe. It is a messy phenomenon, complex and full of different matters intra-acting (just like social media). Making knowledge about the world must never only be about reflecting what we see and encounter, treating empirical findings as truths. Instead we must ask questions to what we experience, in search of the apparatus that makes what we see, explore the complex entanglements of matters, and elucidate how they act, intra-act and perform together, thereby influencing each other, constituting each other and make joint/different phenomena as complex entanglements. But how?

**Diffraction as metaphor**

Haraway was the first scientist to use diffraction as a metaphor for feminist academic purposes (1997). Diffraction, as Haraway presents it, is an attempt to step away from doing science in order to mirror or reflect the world as it appears. Instead, diffraction offers a possibility to understand the unknown and extend the answers we seek, providing entry to stages and places we would not see or find if we only looked for frozen moments in time with reflected, mirrored pictures of phenomena (Ibid). Barad (2007, 2014) has taken
diffraction to another level of complexity, claiming that it provides foundations for a new way of doing research, a new understanding of the world, a new ontology. Diffraction, in contrast to reflection, can give us tools enabling us to see how specific material entanglements become instead of reflecting and mirroring how a static world is (Ibid). Diffraction is a critical practice that aims to map out differences from within in order to understand which differences matter, how they matter and for whom. Doing science through a diffracted lens is to try to metaphorically grasp the directions and intentions of a phenomenon and thereby provide new knowledge of how the world is constituted and operates (Haraway 1991, 1997).

Drawing on the metaphor of how light and water travel and behave, in their respective works Haraway and Barad suggest that diffraction can be more than a metaphor, it can also can be used as methodology. This is what I have tried to do, in my attempts to apply feminist technoscience, as follows. In the figure below, a ray of light (A) meets a surface (D) and some of the light is reflected (B) at an angle (relative to a line perpendicular to the surface) matching the angle of incidence (relative to the same perpendicular). Observations of such “mirrored” images provide representations of reality as it appears to us (B equals A). However, according to Haraway’s and Barad’s suggestions regarding diffraction we should also search for the other patterns created by A, by examining the diffracted light that also appears in the phenomenon (C). We can then acquire other stories, other indications of truths from the same source. We break the mirroring and search for other patterns, different patterns. One can see A as the intentions of use by the people inhabiting social media. Then B would be their words or pictures as a huge material representing them all. Mirrored as several different truths. D can be seen as the digital material social media is built upon and that A
always is traveling through. Then C would be the different stories that are seldom heard of but still exists and come from the same source. C are the stories I have told in this thesis.

Figure 14.2. Light (A), reflected (B) and diffracted (C) from a surface (D). B and C provide different indications of A and the medium (D) it interacts with.

**Diffraction as methodology**

By leveling out matters of different kind, human and non-human I have tried to encounter the included entities in the phenomenon of (norm breaking) sharing online. However, I also needed to bring voices to the phenomenon, stories that are lived, felt and experienced. Some of these stories you have read in act 2. These stories can be regarded as the colored rays in Figure 2, diffracted examples of norm-breaking sharing in social media. However, even diffracted stories may be mirrored and flat, providing knowledge of
differences within but still not knowing how this differences become. To avoid this I have tried to situate myself at the other end of the colored rays, at the moment when matter meets matter, the center point at which the ray splits, the moment when these different stories emerge, where they bend together around whatever material they are circulating around and within. This is when touch occurs, when relations emerge and become together, the intra-action where technology and humans perform by, with and through each other. A point of mutual shaping. An apparatus.

Using diffraction as methodology I have searched for the apparatus that constitutes the phenomenon of norm-breaking online sharing, hoping to find traces of our own, unreflected everyday mundane use of social media. As Haraway (1992, 1997) and Barad (2007) point out, diffraction serves as an important counterpoint to reflection and mirroring, giving us different perspectives and other insights of phenomena in the world. Doing science through a diffracted lens, trying to metaphorically grasp the directions and intentions of entities involved in a phenomenon, can provide new knowledge of how the world is constituted and operates. With this in mind I have chosen not to study the common use of social media, but instead concentrated on the unexpected, the unusual, the shocking and the sometimes obscure. By studying extreme cases of exposure, where the stories being told evoke responses of sadness, disgust or alienation I have grasped for the unknown and diffracted parts of how we live with and through technology (Barad 2007, Dolphijn & van der Tuin 2012).

In terms of another diffraction metaphor I have explored the possibility of analytically diffracting my stories, looking for differences that matter in the common entanglements. This can be
metaphorically illustrated by waves of water moving towards a shore and hitting rocks on its way (Figure 14.3). The rocks cause the waves to bend and create diffraction patterns as they travel towards the sandy beach.

Figure 14.3 Metaphorical illustration of intra-actions in the phenomenon of online sharing of norm-breaking through social media (depicted as water waves), via various digital things (rocks), with various Others, generating narratives on various themes

The waves here can be seen as uses (intended and unintended) of social media, while the rocks can be seen as digital things. As waves (signals from the users) pass through gaps between the rocks (channels provided by the digital things) they bend and change direction. The rocks, on the other hand, are affected by the water and all the waves that hit them change their shape, eventually grinding them down to sand that is slowly washed up onto the land or carried away by the current. Furthermore, the diffraction pattern caused by every rock affects the diffraction patterns created by all the other
rocks. These are the patterns I have sought, the entanglements of actions when bending around the same but still different other matter. Those patterns give information on not only the flow and density of the water which carry information on not only the flow and density of the water but also performative effects of the rocks on the water, and vice versa.

My methodological use of diffraction for exploring the agency in material-discursive practices has also been extended by Barad's advocacy of posthuman perspective(s), particularly attempting to adopt a matter-centric view, ignoring any anthropocentric worldviews, to obtain new perspectives and insights. Language is no longer granted all the power, even if it is an important tool for making knowledge and saving knowledge for futures to come (Barad 2007). Filtering one materiality through another and avoiding bias towards human or nonhuman perspectives or agencies is truly difficult, but essential in order to find new ways to produce knowledge. Scholars within feminist technoscience and new materialism agree; the path to new knowledge needs something more than reflection since this still holds the world at a distance (Haraway 2011, Barad 2012, Lykke 2010, Braidotti 2013, Hayles 1999 etc.). Phenomena such as norm-breaking online sharing are often researched through reflection-based methods, which can provide knowledge of what people are doing and perhaps (if we ask them, and they answer truthfully) why they think they are doing it, according to their own understanding. However, this still does not tell us how the phenomena become together with technology, only how humans interact (or think they interact) with each other and the technology. If we do not consider the different materialities, involved we may end up making truth claims and knowledge about illusions like a broken pen.
Diffraction offers another possibility, by leveling out the agencies of matters involved, aligning them, searching for common grounds, patterns of differences that matter and relations between. But still this is not enough; we need to somehow come close to this knowledge. Touch might be the answer

**Touch as onto-epistemology**

Touch is the sensuality of matters coming together, feeling each other, investigating each other by the feeling of pressure, presence, temperature or just a vague sent of an other. To touch means to learn about ourselves and our becoming together with whatever we are in touch with (Barad 2012). For example, we can never truly know how a hand feels if we do not let it come in touch with something else, like our other hand. Then, when one hand encounters the other we feel the surface of our self, and at the same time we can touch and greet the stranger within (Ibid). I have drawn this example of matter meeting matter from the article On Touching - The Inhuman there for I am, a text where Barad plays with the classic quote “I think, therefore I am” by Descartes (1637), questioning how our thought can be superior to our touch (or, better, sensory perceptions), and why experiences of bodies should be overruled by language as the central node for knowledge.

Onto-epistemology is Barad’s suggestion for how we can make sense of this world beyond anthropocentric traditional science. By uniting ontology and epistemology she highlights the fact that all of this world is composed of phenomena, and the only things we can make knowledge about are relations within or between them. Onto-epistemology is the knowledge of the joint phenomena’s becoming, a knowledge production in its being and making at the same time. We
are of this world not in it, Barad (2007) states referring to the agency of phenomena, an agential realism bringing justice-to-come according to our relation bounds.

Transferring onto-epistemology to hands-on, concrete research practice is truly not an easy task or something to take lightly. In this thesis I have tried to explore how to practically handle knowledge production in a moving and constantly changing phenomenon such as norm breaking sharing in social media. Studying dirt as “matter out of place” can put us “in touch” with unspoken norm systems and hidden connections of entangled matters, systems composed of entangled emotions, designs and artifacts. We must study the making of such systems in order to understand dirt as phenomena generally (Douglas 1966), and dirt in norm-breaking online sharing particularly.

To understand matter “out of place” and to make sense of “dirt” we need to come close enough to the matter and the material to touch it and allow it to touch us. Norm breaking online sharing has served as my empirical touch in the search for knowledge of the relationships' between matter and meaning, time and space, history and future, human and non-human. Encountering uncomfortable empirical examples of the online sharing of bodies and emotional dirt has provided me with embodied experiences of a digital togetherness and knowledge about this crossing of borders and constant shift of social norms.

In this posthuman world we live, love and die. We become together as different materialities, meeting and intra-acting in a constant process of new encounters and new entanglements, making new meanings and alternative futures. It is difficult to make sense of a
phenomena that are in constant flux, which cannot be fully grasped or explained, like posthuman entanglements and their mutual becoming in social media settings that are never fixed in either space or time. Moving from within the phenomena, situated as a modest witness present but silent, I have strived to diffract the phenomena in order to make new visible (or, rather, tangible or perceptible) patterns of knowledge.

So, can feminist technoscience be used as a practical, hands-on method for establishing an alternative and critical analytical framework by focusing on the performance of feminist technoscience? Yes, I would say it could. In the next chapter I will present findings obtained by using diffraction and touch as methods, postulating that this allows us to move in directions reflection would not permit, and to find connections and relations that are important but blurred at an empirical surface. By performing feminist technoscience I have found pathways to knowledge, an understanding beyond the obvious, beyond the dirt and its uncomfortable truths.
15. TechnoEmotions

I set out to elaborate, investigate and explore the entangled relationships between human and technology in social media settings. Guided by norm-breaking practices forming uncomfortable narratives and digital dirt, I have sought to produce knowledge of the phenomena beyond reflections from the empirical surfaces. As explained in the previous chapter I have been using approaches rooted in posthumanism and feminist technoscience theory to seek patterns caused by the intra-actions and “touch” the phenomena in efforts to obtain a critical and deeper understanding of our online togetherness.

Although this thesis is empirically dense my mission has never been to look at - but through - these sometimes extreme cases in search for posthuman relations and practices apart from our first encounter. The consequence of looking through instead of at is offering us new knowledge as we become a modest witness of posthuman encounters. By diffraction (not reflection), through several agential cuts (together and apart), this phenomenon has been mangled through its different materiality’s in search for patterns of the common, waives of differences that matter, possible features cutting across and together. Although this thesis is empirically dense my mission has never been to look at - but through - these sometimes extreme cases in search for posthuman relations and practices apart from our first encounter. The consequence of looking through instead of at is offering us new knowledge as we become a modest witness of posthuman encounters. By diffraction (not refection), through several agential cuts (together and apart), this phenomenon has been mangled through its different
materiality’s in search for patterns of the common, waives of differences that matter, possible features cutting across and together.

In these in-betweens I have found several diffraction patterns rising from my material, entangled in the threads of commonalities, intentionalities and materialities. They co-consist, co-exist and become together, revealing aspects of the phenomenon’s nature and perhaps becoming, diffractively cutting together and apart, across the empirical cases, co-creating the phenomenon, feeding the phenomenon, exciting the phenomenon. The patterns are outcomes of matter meeting matter - human/digital compositions. The patterns are never attached, but they are inscribed in the bodies made by flesh and the bodies made by technology. They are non-specific material, belonging to neither objects nor subjects, but instead potential performative agents lingering in the phenomenon as parts of every meeting, every relation and every possible figuration. They participate in formation of a posthuman apparatus, affecting the outcome as well as the precondition for the stories in my material. I call them technoeemotions.

Four patterns seem particularly prominent in the material: Trust, Truth, Time and Embodiment. So, I consider these most strongly in the following sections, although I also mention a few others. It is impossible to talk about them without joining them with their absence, as their absence is their other self, just as powerful and performative. Perhaps this is what makes them particular, as they are not separable from their own otherness37. Thus, Trust becomes (dis)trust, Truth (Fiction)Truth, Time (eternal)Time and Embodiment (dis)Embodiment highlighting the ambiguity of my

37 ... and it is only through our other self we can understand the real (Barad 2012)
technoemotions in their becomings, as discussed in the following sections.

Figure 15.1 Diffraction patterns and Technoemotions
(dis)Trust

The first technoemotion that appears as performative and central within the phenomenon is trust. Trust (and its counterpart distrust) seems to be connected to all parts of my gathered material, constantly posing questions regarding its presence or absence.

People are repeatedly breaking norms of what we generally share with strangers in public, trusting the unknown others with their inner selves. The stories are entwined with digital weaving patterns of trust, influencing each other and depending on each other. Trust in this context does not appear to be rational or logical, rather as a force or power of its own, showing itself as a relational bound of the subjects’ and objects’ mutual makings, a technoemotion bending the experience together with the matter itself, blending human and technology, design and lack of the same. Trust is a between – it lingers within the phenomenon and affects all its matter.

As in all my identified technoemotions trust appears most prominent in its absence, when it has been betrayed or hidden, dependent on its counterpart distrust to even exist. Repeatedly throughout my material I find that people seem to be fully intellectually aware that they are performing acts online in a public space, but at the same time emotionally they are experiencing something else. Their mind is telling them one thing and their heart (or guts) something else. Why,
one may wonder? Why do people know but act as if they do not know (or care)?

Social media are designed to facilitate communication and openness, with minimal requirements for technical skills. In fact, an outspoken ideal in digital design is total transparency; a state of use in which the technology disappears and all that users perceive is what it facilitates. Seamless interfaces and systems are developed with the idea that the user should experience as little technical friction as possible by being intuitive and easy to use (Nielsen 1999). Social media are also designed to make us feel safe, incorporating reassuring features intended to offer us a feeling of private space, despite knowing that we are acting in a public place. Control of minor things like timelines, security settings, font sizes, background colors and people to interact with lures us into a feeling of security, seclusion, inclusion and safety. Does this sense of trust (or absence of distrust) make us feel that we are acting in a private arena, knowing we are not, or does the need to create a togetherness in sharing override any feeling of distrust?

Trust is the oil that keeps social systems running, and co-existing as humans without it would be very problematic. Trust is existential (Kalman 1999) and social, often referred to as a foundation for human life (Løgstrup 1997, Liisberg et al. 2015). Trust is also something we can feel toward strangers, at least if we understand the system they operate within. For example, we tend to trust the bus driver who takes us to work, trash-collectors and the doctor we see

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38 This is what terrorists also know and use as their most powerful weapon. If we lose the feeling of trust we tend to feel fear, and fear feeds hate, destruction and irrational behavior.
39 In everyday live we often claim that trust is a key element of a good relationship, a healthy marriage or what we want to experience when dealing with our bank or taking our children to daycare in the morning (Courtright 2011).
when our knee hurts. Trust also seems to be a foundation for most human life, and for the phenomenon of norm-breaking sharing. As a technoemotion, a posthuman entanglement, it is present not only in the intra-action between humans but also in our relationships with technology, between technology and within technology as it is part of its origin, its design, its making (Bødker 2007). This indicates that trust is not only something we have in the person on the other side of the screen but also something that we build in to the design of technology, creating personalized places where we feel sufficiently secure to open up our inner thoughts and secrets. Trust is the engine as well as the fuel. It can also be sneaky and hidden, being performative and encouraging ethically questionable responses and actions.

For Mary who had already lost her child (Chapter 8) trust was no longer an issue. Neither was truth. She had lost everything, trusting the other was not her concern, and she knew the truth. However, her readers trusted her to tell the story of her life connected to her daughter’s suicide, and nothing else. One day Mary wrote a different post on her blog, revealing that she had been sexually abused by a family member as a child. This might have been just as hard for Mary to write about as it was to open up about her child’s death. But visitors of her blog had come to read and share the memory of a lost one, or to understand how their family might react if they committed suicide, not to read about a sexual assault 30 years ago, and it provoked a strong reaction. The comments were direct and clear: this was not part of the deal. Mary was suddenly questioned about why she was giving out such personal information on a public blog. Clearly, an unspoken norm had been broken; this was “supposed to be” a blog about grief, loss and prevention of suicide – not a place to dwell on the author’s childhood. Since I have not interviewed Mary I
do not know her responses, except for her next blog post where she asks her readers to calm down and not worry about her choice to open up about this clearly betrayed some form of trust that readers felt, although her blog was very emotionally dense they clearly felt there were unspoken rules regarding feelings she was and was not supposed to evoke.

Trust can be risky since our judgment and decisions are often based on it without fully considering possible implications or consequences letting it use our unawareness as its performative act (Scheman 2012). Thus, we can proceed without friction or interruption, but what would this phenomenon be like without trust as a binding technomotion? Would we intra-act with others if distrust was the prominent feeling? Would we intra-act with non-human objects/subjects if we feared they may harm us, or even destroy us? Would they intra-act with us? Perhaps designing for distrust would trigger greater attention to the morality of our online actions, and thus be better from a moral perspective? Perhaps designing for distrust is the key to a collective responsibility? Or maybe it would only make us feel isolated?
(fiction)Truth

Truth (together with its counterpart fiction) is the second prominent pattern as a performative technoemotion, an apparatus operating between subjects and objects; in this case the performer, the technology and the others. The truth may be either “real” or “fictional”: patterns of truth and/or fiction are always present in norm-breaking sharing and truth seems to be important, but optional to varying degrees in different contexts, interacting with its other self, and posing profound questions: am I real or not, does this exist or not, is everything we experience here only fiction, and is fiction not true?

When internet was new truth was not an issue, quite the opposite. It was seen as an arena to try out alter egos, be whoever you wanted to be, explore and move beyond what then was considered the materially-bounded truth about yourself – your physical body’s truth. If you were a man you could be a woman and vice versa, you could even be a fictional figure. Nobody could know if you were attractive or not, if you were disabled or able-bodied, black or white etc. Truth, I will claim, was set as optional by default. This still affects our use and relation to the notion of truth online, always keeping the door ajar for it to be optional.

In the case of Markus (Chapter 8) it became clear that the people virtually present did not expect him to die. The situation was so extreme that they chose to believe that Markus was a fake, a troll
fishing for attention. Nothing in the design of the technology they used helped them to judge the situation differently. The design and shape of digital technology have performative abilities. Notions of closeness and trust fostered by its intuitive interfaces and personalized designs play with our feelings of presences, allowing us to feel one thing while knowing another. When Marcus was presenting his suicide plans he put his life/death in the hands of the strangers – trusting them to stay with him in his life’s last moments. He waited until there were enough people present to share in his passing; he adjusted the camera so that he remained in focus during the hanging and trusted the world to deal with recordings of his death. Trust was also a major issue for the spectators; they argued about whether to trust Marcus or to regard him as a fake, and whether or not to trust the recordings. Distrust does not enter the scene but the notion of fiction does and truth suddenly revels itself as another important technoemotion, making it optional to believe Marcus or not. Truth is clearly manifested as another important technoemotion, as the spectators wonder whether or not to believe Marcus; perhaps it is only fiction after all? The moment the others present realize that the event is not fiction, but true the entire discussion changes. Suddenly hundreds of anonymous people realize they have been witnessing a suicide, not doing anything to hinder it (often the opposite in the hope of revealing Marcus as a fraud).

These and numerous other facets of the observed phenomena raise profound questions. Is truth important? If so, from whom and why? And what is truth anyway; can it be measured, and if so how?

Re-considering the double slit experiment described in Chapter 3, empirical truths clearly depend on the measurement apparatus, and the measurements themselves affect what is measured. So what is
then the theoretical or logical truth? Are there both empirical and rational truths? May a truth also be the opposite of other truths, another truth or just another facet of the same truth? Is the counterpart to truth falseness, and if so how can falseness be defined or measured? And when we say false - for whom do we speak?

If I write a blog about self-harm, post pictures of my wounded flesh and reveal my darkest thoughts involving death – is it all untrue if it turns out that I do not cut myself but re-post other people’s pictures? Is it then fiction? Or is it just false? What if Mary just made everything up? Perhaps she did not even have a daughter. Perhaps Mary is a man, or a dog for that matter. What if Mary herself wished to die and the only reason she wrote her blog was to talk about her sadness, but through a fictional story. For me as a visitor passing through, reading, experiencing the pain it feels very true. Have I then been lured to trust something that is not true? Where does that take us?

(fiction)truth and (true)fiction are two sides of the same coin as technoeemotion speaking. When the norm-breaking sharing becomes too hard to handle many seem to dismiss what they encounter as fiction. On the other hand, when presented with actual fiction in games, clips and movies people often claim there is a strong element of truth, a reality, and the games industry invests vast amounts of time and money in making their fiction appear real – true – even though the gamers know it is fiction. This approach has not spread to the designers of social media. Here we are given no features at all to help us to judge whether what we encounter is true (real) or not. It is left to our own judgment (or intention) to decide.
This optionality of truth creates problems in social media, especially in the phenomenon of norm-breaking practices since it complicates relations of the others. Another problematic element is hate speech, i.e. people posting threats and images or texts intended to incite hatred or humiliate targeted individuals or groups, often anonymously. When the haters are confronted with their posts they often say “I didn’t mean it” or “It was just a joke”, but on the other side of the screen there is a person who cannot choose to regard them as fictional or jokes, but instead becomes isolated and afraid. What if we started to design to prevent truth being optional? What would such technology be like? Is it even possible?
(dis)Embodiment

Bodies talk. Bodies perform. Bodies affect and effect. We live in them, through them, on them, without them\(^{40}\). Bodies are at the core of intra-action(s) in humantechnological phenomena through the social and by the material. The posthuman body is a body without organs, a body that is more than human, more than techno, more than human-techno. A posthuman body is dressed in the phenomenon it is encountering, playing out its significant roles by making stuff out of entangled matter. Thus, a posthuman embodiment should be seen as the non-touchable flesh lingering between philosophical, physical and psychological constructs.

The dirt in my empirical examples has a stickiness that evokes and provokes, perhaps as an “effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects and signs” (Ahmed 2004a) or perhaps as posthuman blur of mass. The dirt and/or stickiness is not stuck in this phenomenon, instead they provide past, present, future effects of an emotional engagement (Ahmed 2004b). In social media we are embodied and disembodied in a unity of actions, intertwined in the entire phenomenon we become through, together and apart, throughout our lives and perhaps even after.

\(^{40}\) “On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight—fight and are fought—seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love.” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987)
When sharing online we not only share bodies and emotions we also materialize them outside of our own flesh, carving them into digital matter, blending together as a united posthuman body. Technology offers itself not only as an extension of the human it also makes our lives by its real, physical presence in the world. This meeting, this joint performative event when human matter touches other matter such as technology makes the hybrid Haraway named cyborg (1985). Putting technology in bodies is awarded and applauded41. Putting bodies in technology is not getting a Nobel prize any time soon. Rather, online exposure of naked bodies, broken bodies, staved bodies and scared bodies raises voices of disgust and need for control. My studies make me wonder if real bodies are not welcome online.

A question raised is the idea (rooted in the history of internet) that why do we think we have a right to be anonymous online? Is it bounded to the lack of my physical body? If so, do social media also offer me places to be anonymous towards myself? Can I distance myself from my own presence, looking at myself from the outside? Online anonymity is used for many reasons. Sometimes it is essential for people to express themselves, to dare to confess a secret or inner fear that they would never reveal in front of living fleshy bodies. However, anonymity also seems to contribute to some people’s separation from a sense of responsibility for what they say and do (in many cases of online hate, for example, in which entangled issues of truth and trust are involved). In both sets of cases anonymity is used

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41 Biotechnology and technomedicine are great fields of science extending human life on this planet.
to hide, and to act in places where the actors feel that nobody can see them.

Since internet’s birth we have been told it is a place where we can free ourselves from our physical bodies, and be whoever we want to be, free from boundaries, restrictions, and norms associated with our bodies. Such Cartesian separation of mind and body is well grounded in our history and culture; it seems as though we need them to be separate entities so we can choose at times to be only one without the other. But is that really possible? Could the feelings of being present without my flesh distance myself from strong emotions, or is it the other way round — that I need absence of my physical body to approach the self that is beyond me, that is in relation to the other(s)? The latter implies that anonymity online — or at least lack of physical representation — will help when we need to understand who we are, what we feel and how to survive or die (Hamlet’s questions in the famous *To be or not to be* soliloquy). At the same time the lack of physical presence seems to both open and close doors regarding our perception of the real and fictional, enabling us to act as if we have a choice about what to believe is and is not true. So when my guts tell me that something is wrong I can rationalize and make an intellectual rather than an emotional call, turning away from what is hard to accept and feel. Is it the lack of bodies that enables us to make this call?

Design seems to be the critical foundation of our perception of our posthuman relationship. (dis)trust and (fiction)truth technoemotions pave the way for alternative processes in our becoming, as already described. For example, Mary was not only expressing embodied personal grief in her blog but also building a narrative body of emotions outside of her, alive in the digital domain, marking history
and time in a chosen reality, where her daughter is alive through her memories, materialized for (and inviting) us to experience as inscribed parts of our own becoming. At the same time her emotions are frozen in a digital cyborg consisting of her loss. Similarly, Marcus takes us to the very edge of corporeal existence by dying online, but making his life eternal through his digital suicide forever lingering, and recurring whenever anyone visits the forum or views the clip showing his death.

Other examples are all the pictures of online bodies, together forming an embodied mass of how it is to feel and live in the objectified ideals of beauty and ugliness, a mix of a freak show, sickness and the unreal. The performative technoemotions are inscribed between matters, but also fostered by the matters’ meeting. That said, design is just as important as intent or use (or dis-intent or non-use), as is its counterpart — the lack of design features that help us avoid a feeling of real presence and thus to act in ways we would not unless we were invisible. Currently, there is nothing to help us to understand if our presence is real, if what we experience is really happening or just a show. This is painfully clear in the mutilation and gore cases, as illustrated by comments made when the man was cutting off his genitals (Chapter 10), which said nothing about what was happening on screen, focusing instead on the idea that he was cutting off the genitals of a dead body. I can never leave my body since it is through it that I exist, unless I accept a mind-spirit duality. I am forever entangled in it and everything I am is through it. Online bodies are present but still absent since they are represented as bodies without organs, in virtual often anonymous space (Deleuze & Guattari 1987) The technoemotion embodiment is whatever a digital body, a cyborg of relations, becomes (and the embodied digital emotions are potentially forever).
These considerations raise several further questions. Can embodiment as a technoeemotion be designed in other ways than today? Do we consider BWO (bodies without organ) as real or fiction? Do we trust them? Is anonymity a default online or do we just want it to be?
**(eternal)Time**

Time is a diffraction pattern that stands out as an eternal entanglement trapped in the messiness of a digital present. Time becomes eternal at the same time as it appears to be non-existent in the never-ending flow of a digital now (Castells 1996).

Through the materialization of the present everything becomes simultaneous: now becomes then and then becomes now and ghosts of futures might be hidden in the past. Hence, time changes form and is no longer linear, the present becomes a distributed now, moving with us rather than following a strict chronology. Time becomes an emotion, a technoemotion, and a performative act in the making of online phenomena, as there is nothing in the design of the technology helping us to deal with time as an agent. There is a clock and a date, and some designs rapidly become outdated so we can intellectually understand that what we encounter probably happened in the past. But at the same time now can also be in the future for the next person encountering the phenomenon, making me a ghost of the past.

Time becomes an agent between matter and meaning in multiple ways. In the analysis of diffraction patterns it becomes clear that online sharing practices have no intrinsic boundaries but are open-ended and cannot be understood as rooted either physically or in time. Instead these practices re(con)figure spatiality and temporality.
as well as (the traditional notion of) dynamics. They do not exist as static structures, nor do they merely unfold or evolve in space and/or time. Every time someone visits the online suicide of Marcus, watching his filmed death and/or reading the comments, he dies again, and again. Every time anyone visit Amelia’s blog she is starving herself, torturing her mind with feelings of worthlessness. Mary’s retrospective blog gives us a creepy feeling of getting to know her daughter even though she is long gone. Intellectually we all know that what we engage with are happenings from the past, but at the same time we feel as if they are happening in the present and we realize that they will be there for us to re-experience forever in the future to come. This does something to us. It haunts us. It defines us.

We need to question and problematize our relation with digital time by drawing attention to the materialization of time within the context of social media and online sharing. A re(con)figuration of our notion of time, its standpoints and norms, is called for by the technoemotion patterns discerned in norm-breaking online sharing, through which the reconfigurings of specific material not only emerge in time, but iteratively re-configure space-time-matter in an ongoing dynamism of becoming (Barad 2010). Time online is not time as we (think) we know it; it is non-existing because it renders all things simultaneous in an eternal mix, so we need to re-create or re-arrange its parts and parameters, thereby also altering or changing the phenomenon, opening possibilities to create ethical responses to the future to come and the past to inherit.

Online sharing involves the production of the differences that matter as well as a boundary-making practice involved in the reconfigurings of time bounded to matter and meaning. In social media now is
eternity and eternity is now, raising another challenge: how do we design eternity?

... and other Posthuman Entanglements

The Technoemotions covered in this chapter are far from all I have encountered in the phenomenon of norm-breaking sharing in social media. There are many other entanglements of interest, but I will end this chapter by briefly mentioning two more: Friction and Frozen stories.

In a human-to-human context friction is based on embodied notions such as eye contact, body language, pauses in our speech or volume of the voice. Friction in a digital context such as social media is different, it depends on the platform where the communication takes place. A platform conforming to the ideal of intuitive design offers no - or very little friction. Trust, Truth, Embodiment and Time are entangled in Friction as they seem to complement the notion of a frictionless environment, enabling other kinds of friction to occur. Emotional content in itself creates emotional friction, and photos of broken bodies or naked skin may evoke desire or disgust, which can be regarded as friction to the mind. Even in a posthuman context friction seems to be what makes us feel. So, why do we aim to design frictionless digital environments? What kind of uses do we think they would have? What future will we build in a world that is designed to avoid all roughness and friction? Who can walk on slippery ice, or feel anything in a sensory deprivation tank? Why not just embrace friction as a guide toward the real?

Frozen stories form another important entanglement in the apparatus of the phenomenon of norm-breaking sharing in social media. There are intentionalities embedded in the hardware, the
software and the anyware that are frozen stories of presumed interactions placed there by the designers. In practice, those frozen stories meet and entangle with living stories of human flesh, bending the experience and collectively making new patterns of experiences and new designs. When Marx talked about frozen labor he was relating to “technology as ‘frozen labour’, as work and its values embedded and inscribed in transportable form… where they [technologies] are used to make decisions, or to represent decision-making processes, such technologies also act to embed those decisions. That is, the arguments, decisions, uncertainties, and processual nature of decision-making are hidden away inside a piece of technology or in a complex representation.” (Bowker & Star 1994). This also applies to frozen stories as technoemotional entanglements, since ethical foundations of the frozen stories are built into codes, digital devices and computer applications. Frozen stories in social media are material-discursive matter that unfolds when put in touch with other matter. They affect and form unseen (but still performative) agents in the phenomenon, not calling for our attention, rather the opposite. However, knowing they are there we find norms and social values encapsulated in technology, making marks on the bodies they intra-act with. Frozen stories hold power. How do we make this visible?

In this Act I have attempted to use feminist technoscience as an analytical framework for making knowledge about a highly complex, dynamic and nebulous phenomenon; norm-breaking online sharing in social media. Seeking for the apparatus involved I have used posthumanism and feminist technoscience to guide me both practically and theoretically. I have sought diffraction patterns in stories like the ones presented in Act 2, read them through each other as entangled matter, searching for important differences
within. The involved matters can never be disentangled or isolated since they are inherently intertwined and forever connected. By diffracting the diffracted stories, weaving them together and through each other I have found technoemotions as important relations between, patterns made when matter meets matter, making the phenomenon become as a continuum. Thus, this Act is my answer to the research questions posed in this thesis.
Act 4 The End of a Beginning

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with;
it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with;
it matters what knots knot knots
what thoughts think thoughts,
what ties tie ties.

It matters what stories make worlds and
what worlds make stories.

Haraway 2011
16. Critical alternatives

This ‘beginning’, like all beginnings, is always already threaded through with anticipation of where it is going but will never simply reach and of a past that has yet to come. It is not merely that the future and the past are not ‘there’ and never sit still, but that the present is not simply here-now. Multiply heterogeneous iterations all: past, present, and future, not in a relation of linear unfolding, but threaded through one another in a nonlinear enfolding of spacetimemattering, a topology that defies any suggestion of a smooth continuous manifold. Time is out of joint. Dispersed. Diffracted. Time is diffracted through itself.

Barad, 2010

In this concluding part I highlight some implications for the future and offer some critical alternatives to understand the knowledge produced in this thesis. Ethical considerations and responsibility guide my discussion as I question our traditional knowledge production and the leading design ideals that are shaping our tomorrow. There is a need for every science to move beyond the linguistic turn, beyond the mere representation and mirroring of the world with an anthropocentric view of what we are, do and become. I would also like to emphasize our need to move towards an inclusive posthuman encounter of nature, where animals and technology seen as equal parts of reality production, and studied on equal grounds as any other matter on this earth, including humans. We are living in a world of connections and humans have no right to reduce agency of the entire globe to something attached to a human subject. Nor do we as humans have the slightest chance to find any focal points of knowledge about the earth and everything in it as the posthuman world is constantly evolving and involving life as we know it.

Somewhere along the way, social constructivism has lost its connection to matter and the performative actions that we are all
entangled in, through human/non-human material-discursive practice/becoming. It is a weave that cannot be unwoven or separated or ever understood as isolated entities. In material-discursive worldings we are always becoming together and apart in patterns of knots and diffracted posthuman life stories (Haraway 1997, Barad 2007).

**Reconfiguring the future**

I will end this thesis by advocating a new beginning. By reconfiguring the present as well as the future we can find critical alternatives to the known and unquestioned. Reconfigurations are simply put configurations but without fixed endings, opening up a wider scope of possibilities and responsibilities. To reconfigure is to imagine rather than design, it is about imagining a future in a new way, searching for critical alternatives to the known figurations of today. In a reconfiguration subject/object relations are reworked, rethought and re-made over and over again, always moving and never with fixed endings. The material in this thesis shows that we need to reconfigure ethics, politics and power in relation to social media.

**Ethics**

Ethical issues have troubled me during every stage of my research and writing this thesis, and they still do here at the end. The due considerations cannot be neatly packaged in a set of preconditions or research rules to follow, such as getting informed consent or a green light from an ethical board. Ethical research requires being in touch with the material studied, the knowledge produced, implications for the future, and the spirit rather than only the letter of the law.
Levins (1985) points out that ethics is about responsibility, not primarily between two subjects but rather between otherness. Thus, ethics grounds every experience in relation to any other. This is not necessarily a human experience, it may be any experience, any related in between, any place where intra-action happens. That does not mean that ethics is a disembodied experience – rather the opposite I would claim – as it requires an embodied sensibility responding to the relationship (Barad 2012). However, the body does not have to be a human body, just any substance of matter with intentionality and an expression. Ethics is a figure of touch and sensibility, felt by the other. Thus, we have the ethical responsibility to experiment with being someone else, embodying another body – non-human as well as human. It is in the very touch ethics can be felt, understood and lived. It is this touch that enables us to respond, to make choices based on the felt other.

As shown in Act 3 we become together with matter as technoeotions affect us and we affect them. In the context of this thesis a contemporary entanglement of ethical choices is formed by me (the researcher) and you (the reader) as the empirical material in Act 2 speaks through us. Ethics in a designed posthuman world needs to focus on the becoming and embrace the relationships we form through each other, with matter, through matter and by matter itself (Introna 2009).

In a posthuman society there are no clear boundaries between the human and the non-human leading us to realize that we are forever together as parts of the other. That means that the other is no longer someone else but is in fact an extended self, relying upon us to become the same (Introna 2009). In times of trouble or emotional distress we see the other as the self, strongly connected through the digital,
forming new patterns of possibilities - sometimes with a fatal ending. We need to respond.

**Power**

History is filled with power relations, power structures and the wish (as well the need) for power to control others. In a posthuman world it is not so clear where the power is situated, or how it formed, as the human relations are extended by the non-human designed other, having a built-in power relation that is often not perceivable.

We need to accept and understand that we form knowledge of the future together, knowledge that will form and create the connections and entanglements of tomorrow. Thus I end this thesis with a plea for a new beginning, towards an approach that enables us to respond ethically to the world we are creating through the knowledge production we perform. I hope this thesis has provided a small step on the way toward such a new approach, enabling us as academics to respond appropriately to the impact of our knowledge production, how it is done, and the knowledge that we are both allowed and not allowed to make.

I claim that we need more knowledge of a transdisciplinary kind that can form embodied knowledge, knowledge that reaches in and out for ethical decisions of the future to come. We need to start over when it comes to designing tomorrow. We need to examine more closely our ideals, truths and technological development and ask ourselves why we do not design things, processes, and choices in our everyday lives in other ways. Why can we not create knowledge that helps us make informed choices instead of flowing with the stream? Who wants to live in a frictionless environment anyway? And what is truth? How do we become together with technology, through technology and by
technology if truth is optional? And will there be a future where we actually ARE technology? And then – how do we design ourselves? Life is not – and never should be – about efficiency, money and wealth. Life is about becoming together in respect, knowledge and companionship, together creating new futures and worldings.

When birch seeds are self-planted they have the potentiality to become trees if and only if the intra-action with the soil, the rain, the sun and the temperature are appropriate. If not, they will not germinate and become birch trees, but instead perhaps food for a worm or microbes that eventually degrade then and return them to (physical) dirt. In order to understand how a seed can become a birch we need to understand the intra-actions, the becoming of the birch, and place our own intentionality in it. We need to design its intentionality as a seed to become a tree. Intentionality is never present in any matter, it occurs in the intra-action giving something or somebody power to lead the direction, set out the paste and design/decide the intentionality and hence its outcome. Its power is placed as a between. In the case of the birch seed we have no idea of its fate, it may become a birch tree or just food but it did not possess any intention. It just existed. So, in order to understand the seed we need to look at more than the seed per se, we need to touch its becoming, the realization of the intentionality. We also need to understand its environmental context, and analogously for the kind of phenomena addressed in this thesis we need to consider the socio-economic-political contexts.

**Politics**

As already stressed, social media are designed to facilitate communication and openness by users who may have minimal technical skills, through interfaces and systems that are intuitive and
easy to use. Trust is an important general feature; it must be there but unobtrusive (as calling attention to it may cause distrust). Social media also have reassuring features offering us feelings of private space, knowing we are acting in a public place, via control of minor things like timelines, security settings and font sizes, which lure us into feeling safe. As also discussed, all these features and others (including the technoemotions (fiction)truth, (eternal)time and (dis)embodiment) have profound ethical dimensions. Furthermore, there are equally profound political dimensions. For governments, these include the balance between providing people freedom to act as they wish, with the responsibility to prevent people doing things that would harm others or themselves. For designers, they include responsibility for creating technology capable of doing enormous harm, aiding mass surveillance or enabling sustainable development and improving people’s lives.

These responsibilities are complex, dynamic, and interactively create (with social mores) secure, reassuring media environments where we may feel in control. However, as mentioned in Chapter 2, artifacts always have more potential uses than those intentionally planned by the original designers, and lives of their own. For example, users’ interactions with the world when posting on public blogs are not included in the design, and the consequences are not predictable. This poses a further question: who is responsible for our actions in a posthuman future? But perhaps this is not correctly phrased, let me try again. Who will have the ability to respond in a world where design of technology offers frictionless use, never calling out for our attention but instead only apparently serving (or creating) our needs? Who is responsible for what we become? What do we need to know in order to understand? How can we make knowledge attractive in times where knowledge seems to be optional? Where is power situated? In
politics? Where is politics located? In ethics? Who really makes the decisions that matter? How can we collectively be held responsible? Who can actually respond?

**Hope**

*Hope is a way of dreaming up possible futures; an anticipatory virtue that permeates our life and activates them.*  
*Braidotti 2013*

This thesis has been targeting a moving phenomenon, a never-ending norm building practice we make together in and with social media. To understand its becoming we need to study the void, the practice of the movement. In diffraction patterns within the examined stories created by the intra-actions between the human and technological elements of the posthuman apparatus involved we can see traces of the directions the practices are moving in; hints of its entangled intentionality. Studying such complex, dynamic phenomena is far from straightforward; it is easy to fall behind or lose track. My suggestion is that rather than following we need to move together from within the phenomenon, touching it as it becomes part of ourselves, thereby co-creating a posthuman encounter in a non-fixated state.

The world is constantly evolving and so are we. This life journey is not about solving problems, it is about understanding futures, reality production and our responsibility in and for this process. We need to understand (and accept) that our actions today will affect generations to come and by staying with the trouble we must not fear the messiness but embrace it as it can offer us a new possible revolutionary way to encounter knowledge (Haraway 2011). Not only does we things to technology, it does things to us. There is no neutral ground or objective truth to discover, only relational bounds to understand and question our mutual becoming. Designing our future
is a great responsibility, including so much more than making our lives more comfortable, attractive and smooth. It involves politics about the big questions regarding the environment, overpopulation, migration and starvation. From my ethical stance, as a feminist technoscientist, it involves finding ways to ensure equal division of powers, between races, genders, countries and voices. Whatever one's stance, it clearly involves profound ethical choices, which provide hope for a better tomorrow. Hope is our future.

Things can always be different.
Epilog

September 14th, 2011, 13:55

To myself - never to forget

Like a stab by a knife and a slap in my face... What I have always known would happen has occurred. What I have thought and talked about, sometimes in a jokey or rather frivolous way is now a hard fact. One of the informants I have followed for years has chosen to leave this life by hanging. It sounds strange but it feels like I have a special bond to this girl. She is the older sister of another informant, a young girl whose life I have been following for years and years. I first found her sister's blog and I have been reading their heartbreaking stories and cried with them both from a distance. They don't know me. They don't even know of me. But still – I feel close to them both. Strange. The sister's blogs have always been filled with stories of death, incest and life situations most people would find too hard for anyone to handle. On top of that they have a hereditary vulnerability that makes life more direct and unfiltered than for the rest of us. Everything feels a thousand times more intense for them... just imagine. With no efficient tools to handle life and no social network to lean on, life can become too hard. Too much. Too crazy. But still ... she is dead...

My head is spinning. It is not like I knew these girls. I mean I was just someone who read their blogs, as a researcher that is – not even as a private person. But can you be just a researcher when you study such matters? Is it even possible to distance oneself enough not to feel like you are engaged? My spontaneous answer is no – it is not possible! I cannot cut out my intellect from my emotions. It is in the deepest emotions that insights and knowledge are born – that is at least how I function. Perhaps I'm weak?

I'm so angry. The emotional me is really, really angry. HOW could she do this to her sister?!?! At the same time - I knew she was sick, sicker than most people that I follow for my study. But still... she is dead... Maybe she was predestined to die young. Perhaps life was not for her. Maybe she didn't have the capacities to manage an entire lifetime. Maybe I should be happy she lived for the time she did. I mean – 19 years is still at least some time. A life. For her. Now she is dead... dead...
Where do you turn as a researcher when the person you are studying chooses to die? Do I call my supervisor? Where can I cry? Am I allowed to cry? Do I even have the right to feel so close to my informants that if they go off and die I am entitled to grief? How ethical is it really to study people who are balancing on the edge of life? I should have backed off long ago. I should have realized that I already had enough material to fill this thesis. I didn’t need to walk with these people all the way to the grave. But how do I leave them? HOW?

Leaving feels like a betrayal, as if I don’t care as long as I get my data. And how ethical is that? Ethical perhaps from a researcher’s perspective — but as a human? Can I do that? Just leave? I know the answer to that question before I even formulated it. The answer is no. That’s not who I am. I cannot just come and take what I need and then leave. I can’t be a half person, only a researcher. It is all or nothing.

That’s it.

That’s who I am.

Damn!

/Eva
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