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Social Networking Sites as Contexts for Uses of Narrative: Toward a Story-Critical Approach to Digital Environments

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Abstract Narrative theorists have identified the role of social networking sites as elementary in the contemporary story economy. This article argues that they have, however, neglected to treat the sites as part of the digital infraculture which creates blind spots in current analyses of the digital as a context for narrative. The aim is to construct tools for a semiotics of the imperceptible, an approachto analyze the ways in which the digital shapes human agency in dimensions the users cannot directly perceive but which nevertheless affect users' sense of what is possible for them. The article first reevaluates affordance and affect as concepts to demonstrate digital environments as a new type of context for uses of narrative. It then shows how these concepts can be applied to readings of experientiality and narrativity in digital environmentswhich shape users' narrative agency on multiple layers. Finally, the article examines how different agencies on these layers can be analyzed within the wider affective logic of the social networking sites. Finally, the article's findings are summarized as a story-critical approach to digital environments, one which accounts for the entanglement of individual agents in collectivities and points the way toward recognizing the ethics of shared responsibility.

Keywords digital environments, social media, affordance, agency, affect, assemblage

Narrative theorists have identified the role of social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as elementary in the contemporary story economy (see Mäkelä and Meretoja, in this issue). So far, existing narratological research on such sites has focused on users as storytellers and "consum[ers] of others" (Fernandes 2017: 2), and thus on narrative as a form and practice for users to share their experiences and connect with each other. This research has focused, for instance, on the sharing of everyday life as stories (Georgakopoulou

2017), on stories produced by multiple tellers and promoting shared attitudes between them (Page 2018), and on the connective logic of broader social media collectives (Dawson and Mäkelä 2020). While these approaches do discuss the ways in which the affordances of these sites may shape "the communicative *how*" of stories told (Georgakopoulou 2017: 312) and do consider stories shared as "mediated by various technological resources used in the contexts of production and reception" (Page 2018: 3), they primarily see the sites as platforms hosting human agents and encouraging or constraining their actions as users. This neglect to treat the sites as digital environments creates blind spots in current theories of online narratives.

Here, we set out to analyze social networking sites as contexts for the uses of narrative. We suggest that because these sites are produced by computation, they differ in nature from contexts that have been studied by narrative theory so far: digital environments do not surround us "like a culture but rather like a kind of *infraculture*" (Lindberg and Roine 2021a: 10).[1] As infraculture, they have formed a new, algorithmically organized base of facilities, services, and installations for social and cultural contexts and also for producing meanings and values. Although such an algorithmic base is often seen simply as an effective structure to organize basic facilities and services, it is rather a sprawling assemblage. It involves not only many forms of human labor and material resources (see Finn 2017: 7), but also a meshwork of agencies, "collectivities through which information, interpretations, and meanings circulate," as N. Katherine Hayles (2021: 37) puts it. While these collectivities do involve a multitude of human agents pursuing different interests, most of the agencies operate on scales beyond human awareness (e.g., satellite-based systems like GPS) and below it (e.g.,

[1] Algorithmically organized culture has given rise to concern in numerous fields of research: for instance, "algorithmic governmentality," a term coined by Antoinette Rouvroy and Thomas Berns (2013: X), refers "broadly to a certain type of (a)normative or (a)political rationality founded on the automated collection, aggregation and analysis of big data so as to model, anticipate and preemptively affect possible behaviors." Shoshana Zuboff's (2019) theorization of "surveillance capitalism" then describes how the very application of big data, such as personal data about us collectively, has presented lucrative business opportunities for various actors.

microtemporal operations of code). Digital infraculture can thus be described as *environmental* (see Hörl 2018), a term implying not only the ubiquitous presence of digital media in contemporary society, but also the ways in which virtually every aspect of human experience is now entangled in and conditioned by digital technologies.

In this article, we begin the work of conceptualizing narrative theory within digital infraculture. This calls for a reconsideration of some narratological concepts, whose core is still predominantly based on the view of narratives as "passive," human-made artifacts (see Roine 2019: 314) and on an understanding of reading as "strictly derived from book reading" (Andersen, Kjerkegaard, and Pedersen 2021: 139). Digital environments, however, are not book-like artifacts organized through and for human sense perception and experiential memory (see Hansen 2015: 40), but a meshwork of procedural and unfolding agencies. Most of this environment is imperceptible to users, and that which users can perceive is constantly (re)organized, updated, and evolved by the meshwork. Our aim is to construct tools for what one might call a semiotics of the imperceptible, an approach to analyze and account for the ways in which digital environments shape human agency in dimensions human users cannot directly perceive but which nevertheless affect users' sense of who they are and what is possible for them. The fact that human actions such as reading, writing, telling, and sharing occur within assemblages whose effects cannot be located in any singular object or agent makes it quite complex for users to imagine the potential consequences of their actions, especially in a narrative dimension, which is at play both in processes of self-interpretation and more broadly as "a constitutive aspect of moral agency" (Meretoja 2018: 11).[2] The understanding that is required from narrative theorists cannot be limited to the practicalities

[2] Assemblage is how *agencement* is usually translated in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1987) work *A Thousand Plateaus*: for them, it connotes a kind of agency without individual actors, a flow that temporarily creates a provisional and highly flexible arrangement capable of agency. Hayles's (2017) discussion of digital, cognitive assemblages differs from Deleuze and Guattari's in describing connections through which information flows as technically precise and often knowable.

of how, for instance, reading works in the digital age, but must be extended to the *literacy* of complex technologies and our entanglement with them (see Bridle 2018: 8).

In what follows, we first reevaluate the concepts of affordance and affect in the framework of relational materialism in order to be able to both demonstrate and analyze digital environments as a new type of context for uses of narrative. We then show how these concepts can be applied to readings of experientiality and narrativity in digital environments, and focus on the ways in which the entanglement in the assemblages shapes users' narrative agency on multiple layers. We move on to examine how the intersecting and conflicting agencies on these layers can be analyzed in relation to the wider affective logic of the social networking sites. Throughout our discussion, we take up examples that draw out the dangers in narrowing the focus of narratological analysis on human intentional action and, instead, put forward ways to locate the traces of the imperceptible through empirical analyses of social media content as well as (para)textual marks left by a site itself. Finally, we summarize our findings as a story-critical approach to digital environments, one which accounts for the entanglement of individual agents in collectivities and points the way toward recognizing the ethics of shared responsibility.

From Fixed to Relational: Affordance and Affect

We first sketch out the nature of digital environments as fundamentally different from the more traditional understanding of the contexts for uses of narrative. As meshworks, they should be seen as *relational*: as the core principle of relational materialism has it, "objects are no mere props for performance but parts and parcel of hybrid assemblages endowed with diffused personhood and relational agency" (Vannini 2015: 5). Taina Bucher (2018: 5) continues this idea to note that as the concepts such as sociotechnical and sociomateriality express, human and nonhuman actors (or the "social" and "technical") are seen as composite entities whose enactive powers cannot merely be reduced to their constituent parts. From this

point of view, we argue that narrative theorists should review critically their current emphasis on activity *by* humans and perceptible *to* humans at the expense of the imperceptible and nonhuman.[3] In existing narratological analysis, agency, understood here as the capacity to act with effectivity (Raipola 2019: 263), is seen as the property of discrete human subjects instead of being distributed, including "interplays between complex cognitive components, the information they can and cannot access, the constraints on their actions, and resultant actions that the assemblage as a whole will enact" (Hayles 2021: 39). These passive characteristics are then shown to affect, sometimes in an almost deterministic sense, how humans tell and share their stories as well as how these stories are read and perhaps shared again. The focus of narrative theorists, described by Maria Mäkelä (2021: 52) as "not specializing in algorithms but narrative structure and its uses," can be described, on the one hand, as upholding an illusion about how digital technologies function, but, on the other, as being deliberately limited to the examination of that illusion: the illusion of narrative structure and its uses being a territory of intentional human agents only.[4] We now begin to unpack this illusion for the purposes of a story-critical approach through reevaluating the key concepts of affordance and affect.

Adopting a relational approach to the concept of affordance offers a useful way for narrative theorists to understand digital environments as contexts where a human subject or even a collective of such subjects is not alone in producing meanings, values, and interpretations. Current literary studies of affordances notably lack relationality: among the most influential ones, Caroline Levine's (2015: 6) *Forms* defines affordance as "a term used to describe potential uses or actions latent in materials or designs." Her interest is thus

[3] The emphasis on the human individual has recently been challenged, for instance, by material ecocriticism and its focus on the capacity of nonhuman matter to participate in the construction of stories (see Raipola 2019), as well as by econarratology, with its approach to the "pairing" of narrative and the environment (see James and Morel 2020).

[4] Mäkelä uses the expression herself, arguing that "contemporary narrative didacticism is based on the *illusion* of immediate, personal experience" (57; emphasis added).

restricted to "the ways that affordance allows us to think about both constraint and capability—that is, what actions or thoughts are made possible or impossible by the fact of a form" (152). Levine rather straightforwardly follows Donald Norman's approach to affordance that has increasingly been applied to digital artifacts and objects too. Norman (1999: 39) contends that objects should be designed to indicate how a user is to interact with them: a user cannot act upon an affordance if it cannot be perceived, and thus, "all affordances are 'perceived affordances.'" This lies in stark contrast with James J. Gibson's (1979: 129) original idea of the affordance that "cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective" and "points both ways, to the environment and to the observer." For Gibson, then, affordance emerges in relational constellations of environment and agent, while Norman focuses on the designer who, through design choices, can enable or constrain certain possibilities for action (Scarlett and Zeilinger 2019: 12; Bucher and Helmond 2017: 236).

Lacking relationality, Levine's approach as well as those following her come to describe both forms and their affordances as fixed, despite Levine's (2015: 7) notion that the "meanings and values" of a pattern or shape may change as they travel and that "specific contexts . . . matter."[5] Moreover, this approach dismisses the importance of the environment. Peter Nagy and Gina Neff (2015: 2) illustrate this in the framework of communication theory: they argue that the affordance concept typically refers "to what users and their sociality get from a technology," and thus the technologies and their design (along with the black boxes, the algorithms, the automatic) is ignored. Their concept of "imagined" affordances attempts to describe the ways in which what people believe and expect technologies to be able to do shapes "how they approach them and what actions they think are suggested" (4). In this

[5] The fixedness is partly due to Levine's tendency to evoke the affordance perspective to describe phenomena that more closely reflect *a feature* of a form or *an outcome* of an affordance (see Evans et al. 2017). As an example of the latter, Levine (2015: 6) suggests that narratives "afford the connection of events over time," which surely is an outcome of the affordance of sequentiality.

sense, the actions and thoughts enabled by the affordances arise both from a specific environment and from the user. If narrative is understood as a form that is used, instrument-like, within a context of social networking sites, we must account for both users' perceptions of the digital technologies as well as the ways in which these perceptions are shaped.

Building on Gibson's original conception, where affordances exist independently within the environment but nevertheless cannot materialize without human interaction, we suggest that the built-in assumption of the centrality of *human intention* in most accounts of the affordance concept must be reevaluated.[6] Following Nancy Ettlinger's (2018: 3) discussion of the intersection between affordance and algorithm, we want to emphasize that as contexts for human behavior, digital environments "encompass a diverse assemblage of both animate and inanimate actors," and they thus actively adapt to human behavior. Although technologies since the invention of writing have shaped our thinking, digital technologies engage in what Ed Finn (2017: 55) has called "a mutual hermeneutic process."[7] Digital environments are not only surrounding contexts for users' interpretations and acts of sense-making, but also interpret and make sense of the users, and as such participate in constituting the users as subjects and anticipate what they desire when they use forms such as narrative. The loop constantly tightens: what users believe, expect, and desire to follow from "telling a story" in social networking sites shapes their behavior, and this behavior is

[6] Understanding affordances as relational instead of perceived has always allowed thinking of them as independent of human perception. William Gaver's (1991: 80) concept of technology affordances, for instance, suggests that affordances can be both perceptible and hidden—put in simple terms, "a cat-door affords passage to a cat but not to me." Furthermore, the concept of communicative affordance promoted by sociologist Ian Hutchby (2001: 30) has similarly attempted to find a "third way" between technological determinism and social constructivism, defining affordances as "possibilities for action that emerge from . . . given technological forms." The communicative affordance concept emphasizes that affordances are both functional and relational: functional "in the sense that they are enabling, as well as constraining," and relational in terms of drawing "attention to the way that the affordances of an object may be different for one species than for another" (Hutchby and Barnett 2015: 151).

[7] Meretoja's discussion of narrative agency provides another way of thinking about such a hermeneutic process. She writes that "culturally mediated narrative (self-)interpretations take part in constituting us as subjects capable of action, while simultaneously recognizing that as agents of narrative interpretation we are both constituting and constituted" (Meretoja 2018: 12).

bolstered by the sites themselves, influencing what, in turn, becomes the object of the users' desire (see also Kangaskoski 2021: 94). From the perspective of users, this loop mostly occurs beneath human consciousness or is even inaccessible to it, remaining on the level of nonconscious cognition (Hayles 2017: 27). This is an important insight for our analysis, as invisibility can be seen as one of the key affordances of digital technologies in general.[8]

This invisibility as well as the capacity to change in consequence of an encounter also characterize the digital as affective environments. Although affects are often connected to easily distinguishable emotions or their manifestations that spread virally through the network in the form of, for instance, a meme (see Payne 2018: 282), they should not be confused with feelings of the lived body. Rather, affects should be seen as that which permits feelings to be felt. In Zizi Papacharissi's (2015: 21) terms, affect can be thought of as the movement—such as the "rhythm of our pace as we walk"—that may lead to a particular feeling. While Papacharissi's approach focuses on human activity and the emergent structures of feeling on social networking sites (such as collective discourses organized around hashtags on Twitter), we want to shift the discussion toward the coexistence of human and nonhuman agents. Bucher (2018: 116) points out that while we cannot "ask the algorithm about its capacity to affect and be affected," it is important to understand "the affective encounters that people have with algorithms not as isolated events that are somehow outside the algorithm but as part of the same mode of existence." Following Claire Colebrook (2014), we see affect as creating a relation between two bodies, each affecting and being affected by the other. This way, we may better understand not only the ways in which algorithms learn and adapt to their surroundings through encounters with users, but also how they may become generative of the

[8] Ingrid Hoetzl and Rémi Marie (2015: 101), for instance, argue that invisibility is in many ways that which facilitates the collection, surveillance, and commoditization of user data, while Wendy Hui Kyong Chun (2011: 2) has even argued that software embodies "a powerful metaphor for everything we believe is invisible yet generates visible effects, from genetics to the invisible hand of the market, from ideology to culture."

user's sense of agency. Framing all affective commotion on social networking sites as of human origin (which is often seen in the media coverage of Twitter, for instance) thus hides the complexity of digital environments as meshworks.

Articulating the concept of affect as a relation of affecting and being affected provides a precise way of thinking about the nonconscious loop between users and algorithm-based environments, or the invisible creating visible effects. It helps theorists understand the relations between people and algorithms as *recursive*: as Bucher (2018: 115–16) explains, users' movements or reactions (such as commenting more frequently on some of their friends' posts to support their visibility, or emphasizing positively charged words) are not just affected by the algorithms, but these practices also have the ability to affect the very algorithms that helped generate these responses in the first place. Understanding this is important for narrative theorists, as such recursivity is also at play in narrativizations of all sorts of commotion on the social networking sites, in making sense of the commotion by means of a narrative form. Although concepts such as "viral exemplum" (e.g., Mäkelä 2019a, 2019b) and "emergent storytelling" (Dawson and Mäkelä 2020) are useful tools for examining the ways in which such narrativizations may be placed within wider social and cultural contexts, they do not account for the fact that the majority of content users interpret as stories on these sites are generated according to principles that are "anything but organic" (Payne 2018: 287; see also Roine and Piippo 2021: 63). Alexandra Georgakopoulou (2017: 327) takes steps toward analyzing this side of digital environments in her discussion of story facilities such as Instagram Stories, noticing the "branding and rhetoric of 'stories' as an app feature" and thus arguing that stories, "however small, are an algorithmically preferred participation mode in terms of hallmarks of the participatory subject" (329). In our view, Georgakopoulou's observation of stories as "app features" is important, as it draws out the very basic sense in which the algorithms can create "the force of movement" (Bucher 2018:

99), prompting the users to react—also emotionally—in a manner preferred by the algorithms.

In order to become aware of the users' coexistence with agents that are anything but organic, narrative theorists should not merely focus on the surface layer that is readily offered to human perception, but also attempt to analyze the ways in which narrative is used in calling a "participatory subject" into being by the dynamics of the meshwork. This way, it becomes possible to examine the ways in which different subject positions for narrativizing both content and commotion emerge as well as the possibilities and limits such positions involve in terms of narrative agency. Furthermore, we argue that while mediated experientiality as the basis of narrative sense-making in the sense theorized by Monika Fludernik (1996) is still valid, its emergence as situated in the lived or imagined experience of an individual must be reevaluated. In our view, experientiality on social networking sites is relational as well, born out of the ways in which the digital environments, constantly adapting to users, make it possible for humans to make sense of the content as being rooted in human experience despite being produced, organized, and framed by a meshwork of human and nonhuman agencies. To get a grip on how a sense of experientiality emerges from the assemblic relation of a user and an environment and how commotion both small and site-wide gets narrativized, narrative theorists must break the illusionary or imagined quality of content as originating from human actions only.

Recognizing the relationality of affordances—that they are not merely qualities or features but depend on the interaction between agents and their environments—points the way toward grasping digital environments as meshworks. Instead of being a "passive" context surrounding human activity, the digital offers a multitude of possibilities to act with effectivity for agents such as algorithms. Furthermore, a similarly relational understanding of affects helps us to open up the ways in which such a meshwork contributes to an emergence

of different subject positions as well as experientiality despite not following the logic of intentional human action. As a result, we are better equipped for our next step, the analysis of digital environments as multilayered, as a way for narrative theory to account for "the myriad visible and nonvisible mechanisms making content available and guiding interpretations of it, human and nonhuman" (Mäkelä 2021: 53). Our story-critical method unravels loops and entanglements of digital environments for analytical purposes: first, we discuss how these environments' nature as contexts operating on both perceptible and imperceptible scales shapes and determines uses of narrative, and second, we focus on the intersecting and sometimes conflicting agencies and interests that function on these scales.

Analyzing the Scales and Layers of Digital Environments

Although quite a few aspects of digital technology operate outside the users' view, beneath the surface, these imperceptible layers affect what users perceive in a manner that is much more fundamental in nature than the loop that always exists between the surfaces of literary artifacts and readers.[9] Being recursive, this logic, in turn, affects what users consider desirable or valuable as well as how they understand the possibilities and limits of their conscious actions, such as communicating their experiences to others in narrative form. The relationship of the surface to other layers of the digital environment can be understood through the three scales suggested by Sy Taffel (2019: 14): content, software, and hardware, which "are not distinct and separable layers, but entangled meshworks that cannot be functionally isolated from one another." Of these three, only content can be directly perceived by human users through interfaces. The other two include various imperceptible dimensions of computation, all of which have their own affordances that unfold and come

[9] Previous theorizations of this loop in the context of digital media include Espen Aarseth's (1997) notion of *textual dynamics* and Lev Manovich's (2001) concept of *transcoding*. Both of them acknowledge the fact that the sides of this loop are not distinct, but separating them from each other for analytical purposes can help us understand it.

into existence through processual operations despite being hidden from human users. As we argued above, the affordances of the digital should thus be seen not only through the formal opportunities and constraints users identify in the environment, but also through the environment adapting to the users' behavior.

The classic distinction between story (*fabula*, content) and discourse (*sujet*, form), called by James Phelan (2011: 58) "the mother's milk of narratology," is an illustrative example of how narratological analyses are limited to the surface for two reasons.[10] First, despite being analytical, this distinction has often resulted in the understanding of story as the intended or natural course of the events "behind" the representation. Such an understanding, then, has caused confusion in the discussions of narratives in digital artifacts, as they can be actively navigated and manipulated by the user, resulting in various different courses of events.[11] This problem, concerning the understanding of narrative based on explicitly stated causal relations, has been addressed, for instance, by Richard Walsh (2007: 66), who suggests that the story is rather a function of interpretation than a reconstruction of the author's "original" story that serves as the basis for the selections and arrangements of the realized discourse (see also Roine 2016). Second, and more importantly for the purposes of this article, the distinction between story (or the "what" of narrative) and discourse (or the "how" of narrative) is more than shaky in digital environments. If the "what" is understood as a function of human interpretation, how should one discuss algorithm-based environments where the "how" adapts to the "what," first beginning to anticipate it and finally even

[10] The approach to storytelling on social media platforms as "quantified," focusing on the ways in which storytelling intertwines with the "measurement regime" of social media (Georgakopoulou, Iversen, and Stage 2020: 19), is one recent, welcome example of the expansion of narratology from this previous limitation.
[11] Gameplay and stories were seen as a complicated combination especially by the so-called ludologists, who argued quite forcefully that digital games in particular display a unique formalism that defines them as a different genre from narrative, drama, and poetry (e.g., Eskelinen 2001). Thus, they argued that the "proper" analysis of games must focus on the analysis of their formal qualities, such as their rules. Perhaps the great emphasis on these qualities led ludologists to form an alliance with classical narratology in viewing narrative as a mode of presentation defined by certain textual features. See Roine 2016: 69.

predetermining it? The question is further complicated by the inaccessibility of the algorithmic operations to human users. We must thus account for the fact that while it is possible to access the narratives partly emerging from the ways in which algorithms affect human users and prompt them to certain directions, it is impossible to access everything that shapes and informs these narratives. In what follows, we sketch out a framework for approaching the loop between users' actions and the adaptable environment through the analysis of the digital as not only functioning on different scales (content, software, hardware) but also being available to users through multiple, entangled layers.

In terms of scales, the digital is always based on hardware of some sort, which from the users' perspective means *a device or technology*, such as a mobile phone or laptop. The content, in turn, is instantiated and generated on digital *platforms* which are software, making use of the aforementioned technologies. Social media platforms owned by big tech companies such as Google and Facebook are illustrative examples of these platforms, which are then available to end users through another layer of software, the (usually graphic) user *interfaces.*[12] In everyday language and use, platform and interface often merge, although interface—in other words, everything through which the user accesses different and differently organized content—is not all that a platform includes. Platforms can rather be understood as environments where certain algorithms function or where their logic is valid, including their own affordances for various agents. As an interesting comparison, a printed book (or a codex), the previously dominant object of narratological research, is both a technology and interface of literature, but in the codex these layers have blended together so deeply that it is difficult to separate one from another. Furthermore, there is no platform to be distinguished in the sense of a distribution channel of content, as the "software" of the codex

[12] For the sake of brevity, we focus here on the layers of content and software, but it is important to keep in mind that hardware has its own affordances that enable and constrain user action and also shape the layers of content and software. For more on the layer of hardware, see, e.g., Kirschenbaum 2012.

has seamlessly merged with the "hardware." This, by contrast, illustrates the dynamic nature of digital objects.[13] In a printed book, the text remains static regardless of the acts of reading or interpretation it encounters.

Interface is often used as an analytical tool to open up the dynamic or loop between the perceptible "surface" and those operations that lie hidden beneath it. The digital interface can simply be understood as the point of interaction between the components of hardware and software. Lori Emerson (2014: x) describes it even more expansively as a "threshold" or "the point of transition between different mediatic layers within any nested system," suggesting that it functions as a mediator between the user and the surface-layer, human-authored writing as well as, in the case of digital devices, the imperceptible machine- or algorithm-based writing. For Emerson, what is new about digital interfaces is not that they create and limit creative possibilities, but that both the interfaces and their affordances have become more and more difficult to perceive—or, as Alexander Galloway (2012: 25) argues, the nature of the interfaces as a threshold has become more and more invisible and thus more inoperable to the users. The invisibility of interfaces is one of the consequences of digital environmentality, but at the same time, their imperceptibility results from a conscious work in design, where the aim has been to create user interfaces that do not call attention to themselves, but "let us direct our attention to the task" (Murray 2011: 10).

The ways in which interfaces as well as platforms "direct our attention" should be made visible also in the narratological analysis. We mean "attention" here in the sense suggested by Bucher (2012: 1–2): not as a type of human spectatorship, but rather as a mode of participation governed by technical rationalities, realized in the automated, anticipatory, and personalized aspects of platforms such as Facebook or Twitter. The task especially suited

[13] In Aarseth's (1997: 62) terms, both the *textons* and *scriptons* of a text can respond to a user's interactions with it. Scriptons refer to the "string of signs" constituting the text as "they appear to readers"—for instance, on a screen—and textons "as they exist in the text, since these may not always be the same."

for narrative theory is to isolate and analyze what one could call the "voice" of the platform: human users create, read, and share content as entangled with the cascading agencies encompassed by the digital environment. This also connects platforms and various agents on it with affective relations—affections—that make up the assemblages where information, interpretations, and meanings circulate (see Hayles 2021: 37). It is precisely the affections produced by the sense of this assemblic coexistence and cocreation that determine which affordances of the platform emerge as affordable, usable, or desirable from the users' point of view, since they are always perceived through this affective experience. Emerson's (2014: 163–64) concept of *reading-writing* describes the imperceptible feedback loop between user and environment in terms of blurring between reading and writing, the practice of writing through the network, which as it tracks, indexes, and algorithmizes every click and every bit of text users enter, constantly reads their writing and writes their reading. Matti Kangaskoski (2021) has similarly discussed the "automatization" of literature in digital cultural interfaces where quick, affective signaling about what users desire has started to resemble an almost automatic reaction to stimuli. The idea of automatization aptly captures the ways in which digital environments adapt to users' actions, the scale of software remaining under the scope of users' conscious perception and blending in with the scale of content. On social networking sites, the constant organizing, reframing, and recycling of content, based on the algorithmic infrastructure underlying it, controls the ways in which users make sense of the "what," thus directing their attention in specific ways.

An illustrative example of interfaces and platforms directing the ways in which users make sense of the "what" is provided by Kristen Roupenian's fictional short story "Cat Person," published on the website of the *New Yorker*, a story which dominated social media feeds at the end of 2017 in a way that pieces of fiction rarely do. Most of the story focuses on a miserable sexual encounter from the perspective of Margot, a twenty-year-old college

sophomore, who realizes too late that she would rather not have sex at all with Robert, a man fifteen years her senior. In their social media shares, quite a few readers associated "Cat Person" with a personal essay and viewed it as weighing in on a timely issue, most obviously the #MeToo movement. As a result, despite not being structurally, rhetorically, or ideologically unambiguous in the sense that content favored by social networking sites typically is (see Mäkelä 2019b: 459), "Cat Person" was quickly being received and shared as such content. Robert is not simply presented as "a bad guy" although he ends up sending bitter and poisonous texts to Margot toward the end of the story; Margot is shown to happily get on with her life; and there are no clear moral guidelines given. Still, the afterlife following the publication of "Cat Person" was bent on transforming it, in Mäkelä's (2018: 184) terms, into the form of an exemplum, a story asking everyone in its audience to be convinced by its maxim through emulating the protagonist's righteous affective responses, or to avoid the protagonist's moral failure. In a more confusing twist, a smaller but still significant portion of readers not only associated the story with a personal essay, but outright mistook it to be "a piping hot thinkpiece" (Miller 2017) and framed it as such when discussing it.

In our view, the case of Roupenian's story being "transformed" into an exemplum and giving rise to "unsolicited narrative effects" (Mäkelä et al. 2021: 154) demonstrates the ways in which social media users' perception of content, or their attention in the sense of a mode of participation, is entangled in the rationalities of the platform. These rationalities are materialized in the platform's affordances, which, for their part, direct the users' perception of what the uses of narratives such as "Cat Person" can and should be. This directing, in turn, shapes the users' understanding of the affordances of narrative in these environments: in the case of the afterlife of "Cat Person," the most valuable affordance can be perceived as universality—as unifying people through evoking shared human emotions, myths, cultural reference points, and values. This is clearly visible in the ways the short story was used: it

enabled users sharing it to appeal to it as a shared, representative example of contemporary dating culture, and its moral ambiguity (perhaps the most "valuable" aspect of it in terms of literary aesthetics) was turned into an example of "how men (or women) are." In other words, the users' mode of participation was directed toward a subject position which allowed the users to make sense of the "what" of "Cat Person" in a manner that was deemed favorable, valuable, or desirable by the platforms.

For narrative theorists, it is crucial to pay attention to the fact that since digital environments as contexts for uses of narrative are algorithm-based, what is valuable or desirable in content is not determined only through social or cultural value systems (such as what is true or provable, as opposed to what is not). Instead, valuability and desirability are governed by that which engages or attracts users, or creates affective commotion, and this commotion is bolstered through the environment adapting in order to increase engagement or traffic. It is noteworthy that although "Cat Person" was published both in the printed and digital versions of an esteemed magazine, it largely gained its reputation through the social media shares and likes which tied it with other linked online phenomena such as the aforementioned #MeToo movement. In this side of the circulation of publications, as certain uses of narrative (or narratives in general) increase engagement, the possibilities for users to create and interpret content in this form increase correspondingly. This can be observed further in the ways in which "Cat Person," to a degree, lost its fictionality, as in digital environments no special value is bestowed upon originality. When a media text or other such content is shared, its "original point" can easily be ignored at the expense of more desirable uses, and the reframings and recontextualizations are equally persistent and exist within the same environment as the original text.[14] The relevance or value of the original is made even

[14] Persistence is one of the platform affordances originally discussed by danah boyd (2011: 46): in brief, it means that as online expressions are, by default, recorded and archived, what remains may lose its essence when consumed outside of the context in which it was created. It is also one contributor to the collapse of contexts, the

more inconsequential by the replicability of digital content: made out of bits, it can be duplicated, and there is thus no way to differentiate the original bit from its duplicate when content is, for instance, copied and pasted (see boyd 2011: 47).

The erosion of the relevance of the original demonstrates the quality of social networking sites as environments where the author of a text, image, or other content cannot control its afterlife, which may consist of reframing and reuse (see Mäkelä 2019b: 460). This also applies to the ways in which content such as "Cat Person" produce ambiguous and complex affections, which are then reshaped, streamlined, and flattened in social media circulation. In our view, such a development as well as the exponential growth in stories geared toward unifying people cannot be situated only within the "omnipresent urge to tell and share experiential stories" (Mäkelä et al. 2021: 142), but also within the digital platforms directing and conditioning users' modes of participation. Focusing on the universal and sometimes "dangerous" appeal of stories keeps social networking sites out of sight as adaptable to users' actions, bolstering content and the ways in which it can be used and reused according to the amount of affective commotion they create. Although algorithms do not dictate users' behavior in the sense of technological determinism, they shape an environment in which certain subject positions—such as the one from which to make sense of "the what" as experience-based—are made more real and available to users (see Bucher 2018: 156).

A story-critical approach to digital environments must attempt to analyze both the ways in which such positions emerge and the ways in which some positions become dominant at the expense of others. Understanding these environments as contexts that are based on the logic of algorithms instead of human value systems thus helps us to follow how

lack of spatial, social, and temporal boundaries in digital environments that makes it difficult to maintain distinct social contexts (49).

the abstract rationalities of digital platforms may be concretized in interpretations of works of fiction such as Roupenian's short story. Being able to follow such rationalities may, furthermore, enable the human users to better understand the nature of their entanglement within the assemblage. As the digital value systems are implemented by numerous agents operating on both perceptible and imperceptible scales of digital environments, in the remainder of our article we attempt to draw out their functioning as well as their intersecting and conflicting nature.

Agencies and Interests

Besides individual users making sense of "the what" on social networking sites, journalists as well as other "influencers" mentioned by Mäkelä and Meretoja in their introduction play an important role in guiding and shaping our perception of the commotion on social networking sites. Such sense-making is often part of contemporary journalistic storytelling, and it typically focuses on narrativizing the surface-layer phenomena of digital environments while ignoring their wider affective logic and nonhuman agencies. In narrative theory, a similar emphasis can be seen in discussions of social networking sites such as Twitter enabling and facilitating "narrative interpretation" (Sadler 2018: 3272) as well as producing "new narrative phenomena" (Dawson and Mäkelä 2020: 21). We suggest, however, that while social networking sites such as Twitter can be described as mediators, they do not simply mediate between human users and content. Taina Bucher and Anne Helmond (2017: 244) note that as platforms, social networking sites are characterized by the combination of their nature "as programmable and extendable infrastructures, and their economic model of connecting end-users to advertisers." Twitter, for instance, affords different things to different user types, which are predefined by addressing them through distinct interfaces, including the end-user interfaces and various application programming interfaces for developers, advertisers, and researchers alike (246). Following this, social networking sites must be recognized as diverse

assemblages drawing together and negotiating between different groups and individuals, all of which have their own goals and agendas (243; see also Gillespie 2010; Gerlitz 2016). Furthermore, while their possibilities to act with effectivity differ from group to group significantly, these differences in agency are not only based on their social or cultural prominence, but also the fact that they are situated on different scales of the digital.

In this final section of our article, we argue that to understand the ways in which the surface comes to be narrativized both by individual users and various "influencers," narrative theorists must account for the actions, affections, and associations related to social networking sites. In other words, while it is interesting to examine the ways in which users are able to "read Twitter as narrative" (Sadler 2018: 3268), it is even more pressing to consider what a reading of this sort ignores. The most fundamental of the agencies are hidden to human users, those that make use of the selection of affordances "enacted within the algorithmic underbelly of digital computation" (Scarlett and Zeilinger 2019: 6). In addition to this, as most sites are owned by big tech companies such as Google, Amazon, and Facebook, there are powerful economic interests and the guidance of human end users toward a more profitable direction for the companies involved, such as gearing toward systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetization of user data (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal 2018: 4; see also Srnicek 2017).[15] While it is important to bear in mind that the interests of different agents are not always explicit or voiced openly—and are therefore an object of speculation in some respects—theorists can still identify interests of different kinds intersecting on the sites, shaping both content and the ways in which it is engaged with.

[15] Alexandra Georgakopoulou, Stefan Iversen, and Karsten Stage (2020: 5–6) analyze in depth the various new ways in which storytelling on social media platforms is currently being "metricized" and "quantified," and pay attention to, for instance, the opaque nature of metrics that make it possible to "measure and count how often, for how long, and in what order and in what location communication takes place."

Media scholars Elena Pilipets and Susanna Paasonen (2020) have shown the usefulness of identifying different kinds of interests in their thorough analysis of the user critiques of nonhuman, algorithmic interventions in Tumblr subcultures, addressing the relational, networked, and affective qualities of the critique. Tumblr, a social networking site, algorithmically implemented a blanket ban on all "adult content" in 2018, shortly after their app was removed from the Apple App Store—an action which is widely regarded as gatekeeping and content-policing and which demonstrates the fundamental differences in sizes of agency. Prior to the ban, Tumblr had developed into a relatively safe and user-friendly space for sexual and gender minorities to come together and, for instance, create and share sexually explicit content (such as visual fan fiction), which was not possible on other sites. The ban, however, effectively meant that material produced by these minorities and their communities was, more often than not, removed. In other words, human users, acting on the scale of content, found their possibilities to act severely restricted while the restrictions themselves were implemented on the scale of software through the means of algorithms. This sparked criticism both on and off the site and highlighted the fact that while the algorithms in question were directed by human designers in the form of coded instructions, the scale of the algorithmic functioning allowed unanticipated effects to emerge. These effects included the way in which Tumblr's ban fell on specific minorities and communities as well as on content that was mislabeled as sexually explicit.

In our view, Pilipets and Paasonen's experimental approach, built on visual and digital methods, illuminates three key aspects of digital environments as diverse assemblages in terms of intersecting and conflicting interests. They focus on drawing out "networked resistance" on Tumblr through: (1) examining the embeddedness of the networks of visual and textual associations in "the attentional dynamics of commenting, tagging, and receiving notes, as afforded by the platform"; (2) analyzing their situated relevance by looking at how

users repurpose this textual and visual material; and (3) looking into the ways in which platforms filter and circulate this material to highlight shifts "in relations of relevance that shape the communicative and affective dynamics of social media" (Pilipets and Paasonen 2020: 3). In what follows, we use Pilipets and Paasonen's empirical analysis of social media content to identify key aspects of various intersecting and conflicting interests for narrative theory: experienced locatability, situated relevance, and the algorithmic framing and circulation of content. These aspects have remained a blind spot for narrative theory, although it has, more often than not, exceled in perceiving the structures of its objects of research clearly.

For narratologists attempting to analyze the role of different interests underlying the narrativized surface, resisting or creative uses of platform affordances are good places to turn to. One illustrative example is provided by the (mis)use of the check-in feature of Facebook, designed to share one's presence in a certain physical location, such as a restaurant or museum. The feature thus makes use of the affordance of *locatability*, a condition originally enabled by mobile technologies (Schrock 2015: 1235). In late 2016, over one million people checked in to the location of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation on Facebook. This was a response to a viral Facebook post claiming that this action would help the activists in North Dakota protesting against an oil pipeline. It was claimed that the police would monitor the activists through their digital presence (again making use of the affordance of locatability) and that checking in would hinder the cyber surveillance of the area. The digital support of the protest received wide media coverage and thus also contributed to the media exposure of the on-site demonstration, but also sparked criticism of cyber activism for a lack of commitment and participation. Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the check-in protest actually had any effect on the actual cyber surveillance on-site, or if it was just slightly misguided speculation on police tactics and the functions of the Facebook site.

What is interesting from our perspective, however, is the way in which different interests and subject positions for making sense of the protests at Standing Rock both emerge and entangle in the affordance of locatability. Andrew Schrock (2015: 1238), too, notes that individuals interpret the affordance of locatability more heterogeneously than an industry-sponsored vision, and concludes that this affordance "can be leveraged in a wide variety of ways." Furthermore, since any type of commotion on the platform fuels the economy of social networking sites that operate with user data, it is more profitable for the site—also in a financial sense—to afford and allow various simultaneous usages than to restrict them (cf. Gerlitz 2016; Pilipets and Paasonen 2020). In the case of Standing Rock, it is possible to identify a number of different ways of leveraging locatability, aligning with partially conflicting interests: those of the on-site protesters and their online supporters, those that were supposed to be the interests of the police, those of the press, and those of the pipeline company. Apart from these more or less obvious interests, there are also the underlying agencies and interests of, for example, the software developers and programmers.

All of the interests listed above are in some way present on the surface-layer phenomena, in the forms of content shared and actions performed on the site, and their presence is what a story-critical approach to digital environments attempts to make visible. For narrative theory, unraveling all interests and associated agencies from one another is, of course, an impossible task, but an aspect it can address is *the experienced locatability*, emerging from the transactions between users and the sites. The tendency of the surface-layer narrativizations by both individual users and influencers to flatten the commotion of different agencies and interests into an experience of an individual or a clearly defined group is fed by the sites constantly adapting, hiding the ways in which experientiality arises from the assemblic relation of a user and an environment. Theorists must consider what kind of subject (or subject position) is produced, and thus analytically separate a user's experience of the site,

its platform, and the interface from, for instance, the (supposed) on-site experiences. In other words, narrative theorists should not only point out that as content to be reframed, copied, and pasted, narratives "will be susceptible to multiple uses and abuses, interpretations and reinterpretations" (Mäkelä et al. 2021: 146), but also examine the conditions set by social networking sites as assemblages to the production and circulation of information, interpretations, and meanings. As Pilipets and Paasonen (2020: 17) argue, networked contributions (such as images in their analysis of Tumblr) are "at once machinic, affective, cognitive, and somatic," and thus they "rearrange themselves around and contribute to novel pathways of experience." Instead of narratives, it is the agencies that are in contest (see, by way of comparison Phelan 2008)—or perhaps different positions for narrativizing content at the expense of other positions. The ways in which they emerge and gain dominance over others should be seen through the wider affective logic of the sites.

Another, partly opposite yet similar example of the intersecting and conflicting interests is the ways in which the affordance of *searchability* enabled by, for instance, hashtags was put to different and sometimes resisting uses during the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. In brief, searchability points out that content on social networking sites can be accessed through search, thus radically reworking the ways in which information is received compared to previous forms of media (boyd 2011: 46, 48). The widespread protest started after George Floyd, a Black man from Minneapolis, was murdered by a white police officer. The hashtag #blacklivesmatter soon became a hub of intersecting interests, exemplifying the ways in which the shifting dynamics of the digital assemblage call users into being through circulating and reacting to online material, as suggested by Robert Payne (2018: 286). This hashtag became not only a rallying cry for the protests, but also a site of sharing on-site information on the protests between the activists as well as a gesture of solidarity for internet users all over the world.

In their discussion of emergent storytelling and the #MeToo movement, Paul Dawson and Maria Mäkelä (2020: 26) suggest approaching hashtags as a rhetorical resource: "the emergent subject" called into being by #MeToo or #blacklivesmatter could thus be seen as allowing individual users to "rely upon the connective logic of social media to give narrative shape to their own shared stories." In other words, while Dawson and Mäkelä acknowledge the subject position as produced by and as a part of the assemblage, they see it as a resource for a human individual, the end user, to make use of. They consequently see that the conflicting interests manifest on the level of cultural scripting (for instance, in the debates of what "the narrative" of the #MeToo movement should be about) instead of being situated within what Pilipets and Paasonen (2020: 3) call "the attentional dynamics of social media platforms." As affective networks, these dynamics on specific platforms are informed by what Carolin Gerlitz (2016) has called "grammars of action." In such grammars, hashtags like #MeToo and #blacklivesmatter are not so much rhetorical resources as a way to streamline or flatten ambiguous and complex affections and experiences for social media circulation: they technically embed ambiguity and complexity into reproducible action formats. Furthermore, they enact platform activities through which content resonates and spreads (Pilipets and Paasonen 2020: 4). As such, they manifest the ways in which the social networking sites themselves turn various forms of media practices into value on different registers (see Georgakopoulou, Iversen, and Stage 2020: 140). In other words, it is profitable for them to let hashtags like #blacklivesmatter host as many affective meanings and uses as possible, such as a rallying cry, a hub of on-site information, an act of solidarity, or various uses that counter or dispute them. Affective encounters consequently "translate into valuable engagement" (Pilipets and Paasonen 2020: 4), not only in the sense that content may come to matter to end users, but also in much more complicated and diverse forms of value production, highlighting the multivalent nature of social media communication.

While Pilipets and Paasonen's approach shows that drawing out the intersecting and conflicting interests requires visual and empirical methods, narrative theorists can aim for recognizing them through the analysis of the traces and marks they leave on the layer of content. To do this, we suggest accounting for *the situated relevance* of content in the shifting dynamics of circulating, sharing, and reacting to online material. The traces and marks include, for instance, the overall on-screen presentation of the material, such as the icons indicating likes, shares and replies, as well as the amount of these reactions. These can be read as paratexts, which "in reality control one's whole reading of the text," as suggested by Gérard Genette (1997: 1–2) after Philippe Lejeune. Paratexts of social networking sites include, for instance, the hashtags, the user handles or usernames, and the user interface, which conditions and enables both the reading and writing of a single post. It should also be noted that an individual post as well as the entire user interface "both construct their own paratextual elements" (Roine and Piippo 2021: 69). Following Pilipets and Paasonen's (2020: 13–14) analysis, one must also be mindful of the different tones and meanings associated with the usage of, for instance, hashtags. Following the ban of "adult content" on Tumblr, humor was a noticeable mode of engagement, as well as a detached and sarcastic metacommentary. These features of online culture call for a nuanced reading of different situated meanings and connotations, and the polyphony of the aforementioned traces and marks. Another example of this phenomenon is the case of Black Lives Matter protests, where hashtags relating to it evolved into different variations diverging from the original. The affordance of searchability was also used to disrupt groups and individuals promoting white supremacy or downplaying the problems related to racism under their own hashtags, such as #whitelivesmatter and #alllivesmatter. These hashtags were, for instance, flooded with unrelated imagery and posts by artists and fans from the large international community surrounding the South Korean pop stars and groups collectively known as K-pop.

These examples illustrate not only that agencies of various sizes constantly intersect in digital environments, but also the ways in which the affordances of social networking sites, emerging in the transactions between users and sites, can be leveraged in different ways. Such leveragings can then both accelerate and hinder the algorithmic functions of the said site, generating different kinds of meaning-making chains. In their examination of "the engaging potential of user contributions and the ways in which platforms filter and circulate them, highlighting the shifts in relations of relevance," Pilipets and Paasonen (2020: 3) develop data-analytical methods for identifying the ways in which the users' actions together with the platform agencies both raise and diminish the visibility of content, thus resulting in a constant adapting of the environment. The ongoing shifts and adaptations are perhaps the most difficult aspect for narrative theory to tackle, but they nevertheless cannot be ignored, as they manifest, for instance, in the *scalability* of content, the possibility for content to scale in tremendous visibility on digital platforms (boyd 2011: 47). In the case of #blacklivesmatter and #MeToo, such scalability drew out both the role of the journalistic media and the imagined quality of the sites and their affordances: in the narrativizations of the intersections of various agencies and interests, multiple layers are flattened and, often, the importance of those with a large following or prominent position gets emphasized alongside human intentionality (such as in the case of #MeToo getting noticed only after it was tweeted by the actor Alyssa Milano). These mediated narrativizations also enhance and build up the size and scale of the phenomena they pledge to describe, simultaneously ignoring and bolstering *the algorithmic framing and circulation* of content.

So, while the capacity to recognize, name, and frame certain constellations and activities as specifically "narrative" (see Dawson and Mäkelä 2020: 28) is based on the actual agencies within the meshwork, their binding to narrative logic neither accurately represents the complexity of the assemblage (Roine and Piippo 2021: 64) nor acknowledges the

diversity and adaptability of the digital environments. Moreover, accounting for the entanglement of agencies shows that narrative ethics in digital environments is not uncontrollable only due to "the confluence of narrative and the forms aiding its social distribution" or collisions "between story-telling related forms and the social forms" (Mäkelä et al. 2021: 146), but also because the functioning of the diverse assemblage encompassed by the environments largely remains both beyond and beneath human awareness. In other words, as different interests interact and intersect with one another in unexpected and often strange ways, and as human users are entangled with them, it is not always clear whose ethicality is being judged and from which position or situation (see also Bridle 2018: 8). This underlines the importance of finding ways to act in a responsible manner despite the fact the users cannot determine the consequences of their acts.

In this section, we have outlined an approach for taking the wider affective logic and intersecting agencies of digital environments into account in the analyses of the narrativization of surface-layer phenomena by both individual users and the so-called influencers. Building on the key aspects identified by the experimental method of Pilipets and Paasonen, we suggested a threefold focus on uses and contextualizations of narratives in digital environments, in conjunction with the three fundamental affordances of social networking sites (locatability, searchability, and scalability), also pinpointed by a wealth of earlier research. The focus on the experienced locatability, the situated relevance, and the algorithmic framing and circulation of content means applying narratological tools in locating and unraveling the (supposed) experientiality, on- and off-site intertextuality, and the textual traces and marks left by a social networking site itself (such as the features of a user interface), contextualizing the narratives shared or fashioned in digital environments.

Conclusions

In this article, we have sketched out a story-critical approach to digital environments as a new type of context for uses of narrative, based on the meshwork of agencies that actively participates in creating our objects of research. Our aim has been to contribute to literacy of complex technologies and our entanglement with them, outlining an approach to account for the agencies and those layers of the digital that cannot be directly perceived but which nevertheless affect the human side of agency. Analyses of literary theory have always been geared toward detailed readings of what lies "behind" the individual narrative or a work of art as well as of multiple viewpoints representing different agendas within such works. However, in digital environments theorists must specialize in equally detailed analysis of the ways in which narrative structure and its uses are entangled with the diverse assemblage of intersecting and conflicting agencies. Simply acknowledging this is not enough: in order to be story-critical, theorists must also be mindful of their own impulses to frame all commotion on the sites as narrative, often serving to conceal the ways in which the environments, for instance, bolster certain forms and uses of narrative in order to keep the users engaged. As theorists, we must look beyond the prioritizing of human action and downplaying everything that is not human. Such prioritization is not unlike the appeals to the universal campfire of storytelling obscuring the nature of contemporary narratives of the public sphere as carefully curated and instrumentalized (see Mäkelä 2021: 49). If we do not understand the imperceptible functioning and mechanisms of digital assemblages, we surrender ourselves to be curated and instrumentalized by them.

In sum, the story-critical approach we have developed in this article aims to better account for the nature of digital environments as relational contexts. Narrative theorists need to be able, for instance, to draw out how human entanglement in collectivities affects the ways in which information, interpretations, and meanings are produced and circulated.

Through the analysis of social networking sites and the ways in which they shape users' engagement as well as their perception of content, our approach attempts to make the sense in which human users can and cannot do something in digital environments perceptible instead of letting it operate out of view. This allows us to disseminate critical practices for the analyses of forms and contexts of narrative in digital environments, but also illustrates the pleasurable and empowering side of agency: of making something happen in a dynamically responsive world (Murray 2011: 410). Attending to this side of agency is vital for both building and understanding humanly sustainable digital environments and narratives online.

Furthermore, the story-critical approach emphasizes the shared ethical responsibility which, in our view, is sorely needed in understanding digital environments as contexts for uses of narrative. While many important analyses on the ethics of digital storytelling have been made on the scale of content (such as asking whose story is being shared on social networking sites), narrative theorists also need to engage with ethical readings that account for the entanglement of agencies as well as the dimensions that remain both beyond and beneath human sense perception. This applies to the conceptualization of the affect as well: in addition to the accounts of social networking sites as echo chambers of—often negative—emotions, narrative theory needs more detailed analyses of the role affective relations play in both creating the "voice" of the platform and shaping human agency, calling a "participatory subject" into being by the dynamics of the meshwork. In digital environments, narrative ethics are entangled in assemblages which not only have the capacity to act as a whole, but also include algorithm-based agencies that possess the potential to initiate a cascading series of relational actions. These capacities and agencies must be made visible and available for narrative analysis: theorists need to recognize not only that "form and content are inseparable and interdependent" and that "storytelling is ethically loaded precisely because it is a way of making sense of our being in the world," as Meretoja (2018: 27) argues, but also engage with

ethics that, following Mark Fisher (2012)—himself inspired by Jacques Derrida— can be called hauntological. This means an ethics that does not merely concern that which can be said to be present and immediate, or which refers to that which has not yet happened, but also concerns that which is already effective in the virtual (see Fisher 2012: 19). Therefore, the critical analysis of social networking sites as contexts for uses of narrative must involve not only that which is readily available to human perception and organized through its logic, but also the imperceptible and unanticipated in digital environments with multiple scales and agencies.

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