EDITORIAL: CODES: POWER AND SUBVERSION

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Fig. 1: Teaser Image of *On_Culture's* 14th issue on the topic of "Codes: Power and Subversion"

Codes can be read or written, imposed or resisted, performed or enacted; they can be broken or switched, made explicit or implemented covertly, can reinforce binaries or explode into multiplicities. Codes hold power over subjectivity and the individual, to shape relationships and the social; they are socio-technological assemblages and tacitly give structure to cultures. Often, it is only when codes are altered that we become aware of their cultural power.

Current threats such as the global pandemic and/or the recent increase in cyber-attacks, in this regard, have shown uncanny parallels. Over the last few years, when supermarket shelves in a country of the Global North have suddenly sat empty, experience has shown at least two very different potential reasons for the unexpected scarcity. One might come to the conclusion that either the social code is no longer upheld of purchasing only what is needed, or that the IT infrastructure for the logistics chain is disrupted when purchase limits are enforced. Either way, those uncanny moments tell us that something here is *off*, something does not work as usual, something has interrupted the patterns of everyday life. In this case, one explanation for such goings-on could be that the codes that run our day-to-day life have been corrupted.

Codes also structure the teaser image designed for this issue. One's first glance probably falls upon the QR code. Its affordances, which became so familiar to us over

the course of the pandemic, beckon us to fetch our smartphones and follow the referential trail. This form of codes acts as a passageway. In this case, it is self-referential. Performing the act suggested to us by the code only leads us back to where we started: this issue of *On_Culture*. Thus, our issue on Codes is encoded within the issue itself—a code that leads to Codes. A *mise en abyme*, codes led *ad absurdum*. The machines and their codes, which we control as much as they control us, again only become visible when they mislead us.

On a second glance, a specter looms in the background, fading into black, standing in for the code that makes this communicative act possible in the first place. As the presence of our journal is based completely in the digital and comes into existence through the digital realm of an e-publishing platform, exchange of emails, text-editor programs, and collaborative online working environments, both this journal and the current issue are made possible only through the means provided by the codes that engender cyberspace, operating systems, and software. Thus, the production of this issue itself is a process of interweaving of digital and cultural codes. As cultural scholars, we, the editorial team together with our authors, have thought about the cultural potential and implications of codes as a concept in both analog and digital spheres. With this online issue, we present to you the result of this collaborative process.

This issue of *On_Culture* looks at the intersections, entanglements, and overlaps of the workings of cultural and social codes with codes of the digital realm.

In her _article, Amy Lynne Hill analyzes selfies posted by trans-identifying Instagram users to explore how the selfie can function as a powerful tool to challenge and disrupt oppressive codes of subjectivity. She argues that the act of selfie-taking by persons whom society often regards as abject beings is an act of abjection itself: a form of digital abjection, which empowers the person posting the selfie to establish a self-defined subjectivity, thereby encoding themselves as subjects in society.

Amin Heidari, in his _article, explores the work of codes in (multicultural) emojis. Taking a Foucauldian perspective, Heidari analyzes their design in the context of stereotypical representation and discursive identity construction in the age of neoliberalism. Shedding light on two central visual codes in multicultural emojis, he argues that there is a problematic color categorization as well as a body template underlying the emojis' design.

Based on the close reading of tweets made by the Norwegian police, Guro Flinterud's _article explores the entanglement between technological and discursive embodiment of code. Studying code as a material-discursive concept, Flinterud examines how the material incarnation of code integrates into a discursive one which enables us to see the technical side of the meaning-making process.

Maya Halatcheva-Trapp uses her _perspective to explore the affective dimension of the scientific process of coding. In reflecting on her own experience of working with codes in Grounded Theory, she highlights the reciprocal relation between the researcher and codes, which sometimes seem to develop a life of their own, and underlines the importance of having a well-defined field exit, so as not to become tangled in the interacting affects and codes.

would like to thank team member Annalina Benner for channeling her outstanding creative energy and designing the teaser image.

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