**Affect and Mediation.**

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**Introduction**

This chapter will foreground and situate debates on affectivity and mediation within the context of digital and social media, literature on ‘media events’ and work on transmediality and hauntology. The shift from media understood as separate entities (the television, radio, cinema) to new media environments that are characterized by dispersed, embedded and embodied practices and processes, often operating below or at the margins of consciousness, raises interesting questions about the role of media in processes of subject constitution. The rise of social media, for example, has challenged media scholars to re-think one of its’ long-standing units of analysis - the audience. Audiences are now considered prosumers or even produsers (see Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010), creating and contributing to media content and participating in processes that were once considered the province of media producers and institutions. Within these arguments it is often assumed that media audiences of the past were passive and now they are active, woken from what is often characterized as a hypnotic stupor. However, there are contradictions in these arguments, which point towards underexplored paradoxes in how we analyze our being and becoming with, through and even *in* media. These arguments have also invited reflection on issues of subjectivity and identity - what exactly do users *do* within and across social media platforms and what relationship do these practices have to their own practices of self-formation? These questions and the tensions that surround them have a long genealogy and open up important questions about how we might analyze and understand *media,* or processes of mediation, as they might be said to operate *affectively*.

In this chapter I will explore some of the myths and foundational assumptions about mediation, which have entered into, re-surfaced and been re-worked in relation to social media. Although social media are seen as distinctly new as a communication medium, what these debates carry are longstanding tensions, contradictions and problematics that media studies inherited from at least the 19th century, and which are difficult to shake. Despite a commitment to the *performative* as a key way of framing what we do within and across social media platforms, the performative is often overlaid by the natural or the neurological. This leads to impasses, blind spots and occlusions in how to address the significance of such forms and their implications for studying mediation in relation to embodiment, affect, identity/subjectivity, audiences and the affordances of medium specificity, for example.

**Prosumption, Performance and Governmentality**

One assumption associated with the prosumer argument is that software-driven media make possible new experiences of subjectivity. It is assumed that media have undergone profound changes and that these changes in media form and practice equate to changes in subjectivity. Where once audiences were passive it is argued that prosumers now experience themselves as active creators and this is reflected in how they experience their own identities. These are obviously empirical questions and ones that rely upon making distinctions between past and present generations (digital natives versus digital novices); between broadcast media and multicast media[[1]](#endnote-1); between the old and the new, sometimes between cognition and affect, and between technology and culture. These differentiations, which map changes in media form and practice onto changes in subjectivity, are often overlaid with distinctions between media understood as monologic and media understood as dialogic.

One of the questions that is often posed within the structures and terms of these debates is the extent to which these moves 'open up access to the production of selves?' (Murthy, 2013: 30). In other words, to what extent do social media forms enable particular practices of reflexivity concerning the production of selfhood? The assumption that selfhood is produced or constituted, within and across historically specific practices and regimes of truth and knowledge, has a long history within and across philosophy and cultural theory, for example. Michel Foucault specifically used the term subjectification to identify the processes through which subjects are both made and actively make themselves into particular kinds of subject. This focus on practice has also been augmented by a rich tradition of interdisciplinary scholarship exploring subjectivity, a concept used to point towards the differences between “positionings” and how different subjects live the variety and often contradictory ways they are positioned as subjects within practices (see Henriques et al, 1984)[[2]](#endnote-2).

The crucial question here is whether social media practices, for example, afford an awareness of these self-constituting and compositional processes, or whether social media is experienced more as a vehicle or expression of a pre-existing self often identified as “authentic” or natural. For some, what we witness are the rise of practices of “me-centrism” (Murthy 2013), which position social media as a vehicle for the expression of a pre-existing self. One of the paradoxes recognised by many theorists, is that Twitter, however, is both 'individualistic and communal' (Murthy, 2013: 151). There is a tension between tweets, for example, which are essentially forms of self-promotion, and those which become an 'event'; that is those that gain a reach and traction, and get taken up by broadcast media or that bring people to the street, for example. As Murthy argues, although social media is often considered a revolutionary medium, it should be considered alongside the role different forms of media have played in social change, protest and activism.

For example, we might consider the role that video technology and art installations and practices (such as the Quilt project) played in activist movements, such as ActUp in the USA and Europe during the 1990's. ActUP mediated protests, which took the private anguish of dying individuals (from HIV and Aids) onto the streets, to the broadcast media and into people's homes, and to the Bush administration and the insurance and pharmaceutical companies. Different forms of media, including DIY video technology of the time, were used to mediate collective action against governments and pharmaceutical companies. The alternative media of the time and its circulation within particular networks acts as an interesting precursor to Youtube (and the uploading of documentaries, video-diaries etc.). These media carried feeling, passion, imagination, longing, anguish and hope, as well as being embedded and circulating within social networks, which were performatively linked, creating a new entity, the PwA (person with Aids). This entity blurred the personal and political in effective ways, and was staged via forms of direct action. In this respect there are overlaps or convergences between old and new media. In this example, so-called old media also operated with the potential for affectivity and contagion (particularly in the context of activist politics and practices).

These remarks also take us back to the concerns of crowd psychology and to the important writings of the crowd psychologist Serge Moscovici (1985). He argued that fascism in the late 19th and 20th centuries appealed to a *feeling* body, recognising that appeals to reason and rationality, didactic command and instruction and staged forms of persuasion would often miss the mark and make followers more resistant to change and transformation. As Moscovici (1985: 104) proclaims, 'the age of the crowd was the age of the imagination, and he who rules there rules by imagination'. Similarly Stuart Hall (1988), the important black cultural studies theorist recognised that Thatcherism in the UK in the 1970’s and 1980's, appealed to particular fantasies, which have become embedded as social truths and social goods. Thus Thatcherism’s vision extends well beyond Thatcher and even the Conservative governments of then and now in the UK. Hall supplemented his approach to mediation with psychoanalytic concepts of fantasy and desire in order to draw attention to the complexity of processes of self and social change. We would be wise therefore to situate the potentially affective dimensions of social media within the context of these long histories of mediation, fantasy, public imagination and protest. As Murthy (2013: 102) suggests; 'Even Martin Luther King generally needed more than 140 characters to capture people's hearts!'

The paradoxes that govern discussions of network culture ask how and why do certain contagions spread and intensify across social and digital media. This problem is seen by some to be usefully addressed by turning to theories of suggestion, imitation and automaticity found within experimental social psychology and the cognitive sciences. One book, which explicitly draws on such theories and concepts to explore the virality or viral logic of network culture, is by the cultural theorist, Tony Sampson (2012), *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks*. He argues that contagion and theories of imitation found within the past and present of experimental social psychology and the neurosciences might provide important heuristics for re-thinking communication processes beyond the human, singularly bounded, cognitive subject. This is an attempt to grasp what is termed a ‘contagious relationality’ (p. 3), which he relates specifically to biopolitical strategies in the present that are taken to work preemptively.

Sampson suggests that preemption tendencies attempt to modulate and exploit emotion and affect, as well as to ‘affectively prime social atmospheres, creating the conditions for increasingly connected populations to pass on and imitate the suggestions of others’ (p. 5; also see Massumi, 2009). Sampson draws a lineage with the concerns of nineteenth and early twentieth psychologists and sociologists and specifically with the potentially unconscious, instinctual or even affective bases of contagion (also see Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001; Reicher,2001; Blackman, 2012; Borch, 2012). The question for Sampson, as with many others, is exactly what does spread? Clearly not just information as understood within traditional media theory, or cybernetics, as what spreads includes political rumours, fads, fashions, trends, gossip, hype, emotions, feelings, affects, sensations and moods, for example; forms of contagious communication that as many people have argued, take us back to nineteenth century concerns and potentially to those theorists, such as Gabriel Tarde and Gustave Le Bon, whose interests in contagion underpinned their own models of sociality (see Blackman, 2012).

Sampson announces the present as an ‘age of contagion’ (p. 1), and brings the past, primarily the French micro-sociologist and criminologist Gabriel Tarde’s work described as ‘Tarde’s imitation-suggestion thesis ’(p. 13) into dialogue with contemporary neuromarketing and post-WWII experimental social psychology (specifically the work of Stanley Milgram and his famous obedience experiments). On this basis Tarde is re-read as a contemporary media theorist. In different ways all these theories and experimental practices are seen to potentially explain, animate, articulate, dramatise, make visible and allow a purchase on the modulation of processes, which exist, below, beyond and to the side of cognition (see Protevi, 2009). These processes are taken to reveal our fundamental relationality with others human and non-human. On this basis, Sampson argues for a‘ revised notion of subjectivity’ based on a refiguring of Tarde’s ‘somnambulistic subjectivity’ embedded within ‘technological network relations’ (p. 13). Tarde’s somnambulism relates to his oft-quoted assumption, that suggestion rather than rationality is the basis of sociality[[3]](#endnote-3). This assumption discloses Tarde’s interest in hypnotic suggestion and contagious forms of communication.

The tensions between “me-centrism” and media understood as operating with the potential for contagion question how we approach and understand choice and agency within and across social media platforms. This is particularly so given the assumption that social media potentially can facilitate 'more democratic and reflective consumption' (ibid: 18). This takes us back to the strange immaterialities of networked virality; to questions as to what spreads across social media, how and why. These questions are framed, in the current debates, through a myriad of theories, concepts, paradigms and debates, which take us back to some rather deep seated tensions and anomalies in how we understand processes of mediation, and contagious or affective communication.

The tensions I have identified and which I have developed in my book, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (2012) have a long history. They go right back to the inauguration of media studies as a discipline, which assumed that media could operate suggestively but only within the context of certain groups (women, colonial subjects, children, people with different sexualities) whose capacity for suggestion was understood as an evolutionary form of atavism aligned to the primitive and the irrational (see Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001). This discourse of the “vulnerable mind” has persisted as a deep-seated assumption, which has been challenged within different ways within and across the field of affect studies (see Blackman, 2012 for an overview). This includes an assumption that all subjects are “ordinarily suggestible” shifting the question to the milieux and contexts within which media processes operate suggestively. In order to realize the potential of these insights I will argue that we need new ways of exploring the relations between subjectification, subjectivity and affect that can move beyond generic arguments and consider the specificity of different contexts of reception, production and transmission: what I also call “scenes of entanglement”. The ability to do this has been thwarted by some of the assumptions that have been made within the sociological and media and cultural studies literature on identity construction and maintenance.

Within what has come to be known as the 'individualization' thesis, for example (associated often with the writings of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens), it is assumed that shifts in governance (the rise of neoliberalism, for example) have led to shifts in subjectivity. As Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012: 75) argue, assumptions are often made that subjects 'change absolutely with the change of regime'. This assumption of distinct ruptures and breaks between one regime of governance, with concomitant changes in the forms of subjectivity that people live, is a powerful argument and one that has found its way into the media studies and social media literature. However, this assumption does not pay enough attention to the uneven and differently distributed ways in which regimes of change and transformation register and are lived. As I will go on to argue, the approach I am developing requires an approach to affect or affectivity, which is attentive to setting, milieu and the interrelated historical, social, cultural, technical, symbolic, material and immaterial processes, which shape what becomes available for emotional transformation (see Blackman, 2012, 2016).

**Transmediality**

In my current work I am calling this an *ecological* approach to affect, which also includes an understanding that new or social media can work hauntologically[[4]](#endnote-4) or transmedially (Blackman, 2018). The concept of transmediality is borrowed from the work of the critical race studies scholar Rey Chow (2012). Transmediality is usually associated with strategies of storytelling, which are co-ordinated and orchestrated across multiple media platforms. Transmediality is often framed as a form of multi-platform storytelling that has emerged and is situated within practices of media convergence and the emergence of networked media (Jenkins, 2006). One might on this basis find reference to transmedia narratives and texts (Leavenworth, 2011), to transmedia television (Evans, 2011) to transmedia technologies, performances and even transmedial worlds. As Evans (2011) argues, the association of transmediality with new media platforms obscures the way in which stories and myths, which blur fact and fiction (for example), might be considered transmedial in a way that is anachronistic to the rise of (new) media technologies. She argues that the history of storytelling is one that is transmedial and to that extent there are historical precedents for transmediality and its remediation within and across networked media.

Transmediality is primarily concerned with fictional worlds, with the transmission and circulation of narratives, stories, myths and texts across time, space and different 'platforms', which contribute to a particular kind of *experience* (of a historical figure, an event, or a television programme, for example). The etymology of the prefix in transmediality comes from the Latin *trans* and refers to processes that cross, are beyond or through. It introduces a particular kind of temporality into discussions of mediation, which blur distinctions between past and present and space and time. This might lead to an experience of immediacy, where everything appears connected yet experienced as part of a perpetual present. This is a familiar account of media time and one that is associated with the entangled relations of the web, for example.

However, Chow suggests that 'shadow media' or social media, which are both atomized, *and* increase capacities for connectivity and interactivity, allow new realities to happen. She equates this to the setting in motion of different times and temporalities; no longer fugitive, fossilized and anachronistic. The events of capture made possible by such time-shifting and their radical potential should not be judged for truth-value or veracity (i.e., as the capture of reality). Rather Chow ties the event of capture to the concept of *captivation* inviting the reader to consider their own investments and entanglement within particular events. Chow defines captivation as the capacity to be 'lured or held by an unusual person, event or spectacle' (ibid: 47) and which underlies the extent to which we might be drawn into particular (imaginary) worlds. She prefers the term captivation over interpellation suggesting that our ability to be drawn beside ourselves involves registers, which might be termed affective and open up to theories of attachment, desire, imitation, mimetic violence, embodiment, victimization and forgiveness. Chow's approach to transmediality turns our attention to *'scenes of entanglement'* and to the potential transmedial relations opened up for radical politics. Although Chow's examples are mainly from earlier media forms (films and literature, for example), her development of transmediality in the concept of social media is useful and I have developed this as part of a digital hauntological method in my forthcoming book, *Haunted Data: Transmedia, Affect, Weird Science and Archives of the Future* (2018).

I argue in the book that the approach I am developing to mediation and affectivity can account for some of the stark contradictions in theorising identity and subjectivity within social media, which often foreground performance as central to the work the self (individual and collective) does within this context, but at the same time falls back on concepts of authenticity, where performances are judged for truth, veracity, and the extent to which they give voice to personal sentiment and feeling (see Papacharissi, 2012). I will develop these remarks in the next section in relation to some new concepts that have been developed to explore supposed ruptures between old and new media that provide some purchase on what might be at stake.

**Mediation, Remediation, Premediation,**

One of the key concepts developed to analyse so-called new or digital media has been the concept of remediation developed by Bolter and Grusin (2000). Bolter and Grusin (2000) define the logic of remediation as composed of two contradictory forces; the erasure of signs of mediation (where the experience of mediation is framed through immediacy), whilst practices of mediation proliferate. This cultural logic resonates with one found in the cultural configurations of knowledge surrounding virtual reality in the 1990's for example, where fantasies of leaving the body behind and experiencing 'reality free from the distortions of mediation' was central to its utopian promise. Grusin (2010) suggests that at the beginning of the 21st century immediacy has transmuted into fantasies of 'unconstrained connectivity' associated with social media (ibid: 2). On the basis of this transmutation, he suggests that the logic of remediation needs to be supplemented with a logic of futurity, described as premediation. Premediation refers to strategies that anticipate what might happen in the future, as well as exploring how the past and therefore possible futures are always in the present. These strategies, Grusin argues, act on, and are disclosed through, the multiple media transactions we make across software driven media. These are leading, he suggests, to new practices of securitization and new forms of governance.

Grusin (2010) has developed the concept of premediation in relation to new regimes of anticipation and security, post 9/11 that have emerged as a response to new terrorism threats. This logic is situated in the context of the US media environment, which continually anticipates possible futures rather than pre-determined outcomes as part of the work that media perform. Grusin cites the 2002 Hollywood film *Minority Report* as a distributed public medium, which popularizes such a logic. As readers who have seen the film will know, a branch of the police department known as Precrime, which enlists three psychics or precogs, arrest criminals on the basis of forecasting future crimes or what is known as *foreknowledge*. Tom Cruise plays the Precrime Captain John Anderton; the film is directed by Stephen Spielberg and is an adaptation of a short story of the same name by the science fiction writer Philip K Dick. This example illustrates well the permeable boundaries and reciprocal relations between science, media, technology and culture in the shaping and realization of new media worlds.

Grusin (ibid) prefers the term *mediality* rather than new media to explore how processes and practices of mediation work within the context of digital and social media. In some senses Grusin's approach might be described as hauntological[[5]](#endnote-5), in that he argues there are different futures immanent within the present; what he terms, 'multiple futures alive in the present'. These consist of 'potentialities that impact or affect the present whether or not they ever come about' (p. 8). These, Grusin suggests, are made more visible with social and digital media given their potential for proliferating media content and transactions. In relation to news he suggests that 'liveness', a logic associated with remediation, exists alongside what he calls the 'liveness of futurity'. This logic extends and anticipates possible futures, increasing what he terms 'the widespread proliferation of premediated futures' (ibid: 47); of what might happen next. Premediation cannot be reduced to media content, as it works through the generation of what he terms a low level of anxiety over possible futures. Thus, he argues that premediation strategies work to shape and channel such anxieties in particular ways; this is tied in his work to affectivity or the training of affective responses. The conclusion of this approach is that we should focus on what media or mediation *do* rather than what media mean or represent. Grusin's (2010) work on remediation and premediation is an attempt to explore how media or mediation does not simply work through symbolic meaning and therefore offers a different way of exploring power; what he equates to a form of bodily affectivity or biopower, or what others have termed biomediation (see Kember and Zylinska, 2012).

Grusin’s approach to the work media *do* in strategies of governance is located within existing literature on the mediation of live 'media events'. This literature starts from the position that media are performative and play an active part in constructing how particular events are framed and experienced. The literature on 'media events' goes back to the early work of Lang and Lang (1961) who explored how live television mediated the experience of a commemorative event. The mediation of the event was constructed through a variety of techniques and strategies (including specific camera shots, editing techniques, and framing devices, such as the voice-over) creating a particular version of events, which was experienced as more 'live' by TV audiences. This *liveness* was in contrast to the experience of spectators who had assembled to watch the event in 'real-time' as part of a crowd. As we have seen, 'liveness' is part of the logic of remediation, which at the same time as it erases the signs of mediation, constructs an experience of immediacy - a sense of being there in time together. There are many versions of this argument, which assume that such a logic of immediacy erases the forms of mediation that are shaping such experiences (see Bolter and Grusin, 2000, for example).

**Media Events**

Work on media events has been tied to broadcast technology (television and radio for example), and as Grusin (2010) recognizes, the 'live media event' is now dispersed across a diverse range of platforms, potentially accelerating and speeding up the potential for instantaneity and multiple futures in the present. He suggests that the proliferation of media platforms and transactions distribute and extend how the media event might be understood, opening up the potential for new objects, entities, processes and practices to emerge. Grusin (ibid) terms this dispersal a form of 'distributed mediation' (p. 90), where the event is distributed across media, technologies, bodies and practices, creating media assemblages rather than static yet live events per se. The generative potential of media events also relates to a rather different logic, rather than liveness per se, Grusin talks about the 'liveness of futurity' (ibid: 54); the continual premediation or anticipation of possible futures before they actualize. Grusin is interested in what makes an issue become a matter for public concern and what role medial forms of power play in generating matters of concern. Why do certain issues become events that demand attention and become the subject of debate, scandal, controversy, scrutiny, legislation, gossip, rumour and protest, for example? These might include the Abu Ghraib photograph scandal in the USA; the Hacking Scandal in Britain; the Monica Lewinsky affair; Pussy Riot; the #blacklivesmatter; #distractinglysexy; and the proliferation of controversies, past and present, which demand our attention, and which connect across space and time. The question of what events become a matter of concern or even relevance is one of the central issues explored in my forthcoming book, which extends this work within the context of two recent controversies in the area of “weird science” that spread across social media and operated with the potential for contagion. (see Blackman, 2018) . Although the media events literature is important in partially understanding these questions, I argue that the hauntological and transmedial dimensions of Grusin’s project can be usefully extended to explore the wider ecologies of affectivity that shape and govern a controversy’s contagious potential. I will return to the term “ecologies of affectivity” in the conclusion of the chapter and provide some examples illustrating my argument in the next section, Media Afterlives.

The importance of the media events literature to understanding subject formation and subjectificaton is also found within the work of the new media theorists Kember and Zylinska (2012) in their book *Life After New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process.* The 'media events' literature is a useful starting point for understanding subjectification because it is one area of media analysis which foregrounds the performativity of media; that is the potential of media to bring about the object(s) of which it speaks. However, they argue that the conclusions of such a performative approach are not adequately realised. Kember and Zylinska's (ibid) position is that media events are not exceptional and therefore containable by the literature and analysis of media events, but rather are intensifications of how mediation works. They argue, 'media events are not anomalous but rather heightened phenomena', which provide the opportunity 'to recognise a process of which "we" are a part' (p. 41). In other words, mediation more generally works performatively to shape how an event materializes and takes shape but also requires participants who enter into the setting in order to keep it alive; what Kember and Zylinska (ibid) term co-producers. In relation to this argument they analyze two 'media events' - the Credit Crunch of 2007 and the experiments, which attempted to bring about the 'Big Bang' at the Large Hadron Collider in 2010.

In relation to the “credit crunch”, they ask whether a British journalist, Robert Peston, could be said to have caused the credit crunch in Britain (an attribution made of him across a range of media reports, for example). Peston famously announced on the BBC news that Northern Rock, the British Building Society was in trouble and was going to be bailed out by the Bank of England. This statement, which confirmed days of rumors sparked a scandal. Peston was accused of creating a run on the bank and sparking panic and fear heightened in his report by his 'breathless' delivery. This presented what for many was an exaggerated emphasis, which could barely contain the excitement of pre-empting perhaps what became a career-changing report. The Mail online, for example, referred to him as 'The Man who Crocked Northern Rock and how the scandal will cost £55 BILLION'. The original BBC News report by Peston won him the Royal Television Society's 'scoop of the year 2008' and became a story owned by the BBC as they positioned themselves as 'ahead of the game'.

Kember and Zylinska approach Peston’s report as a 'performative statement' where journalists do not act alone (to bring about the crisis) but rather act in concert with other agencies and actors, such that Peston was framed as a co-producer who contributed to what came about - financial collapse. Here they extend notions of performativity by recognizing that agency is distributed across a range of actors and agencies (human and non-human) and cannot be located therefore within the agency of the self-contained journalist. Thus the performativity of the event does not relate to its' 'liveness', but rather to the capacity of the journalist to stage an event (the news report), which became an *attractor[[6]](#endnote-6)*. This attractor linked and channeled a range of actors, agencies, entities and objects into an object, the Financial Crash. In that sense, Kember and Zylinska wryly parody the sensationalism of the news headlines, which blamed Peston for bringing about the credit crunch. And as even the various news agencies and institutions recognized, this was not achieved by objective reporting, but rather an anticipation of what might come, pre-mediating a possible future-yet-to-come. This is also a good example of what Grusin (2010: 144) would describe as 'making futurity present'. The actualization of this possible future was confirmed days later with images of queues of depositors outside Northern Rock anxious to retrieve their savings (see Figure 1).



Figure 1 - depositors queuing outside Northern Rock to withdraw their money

However as Kember and Zylinska point out, it becomes difficult within this distributed and dispersed circuit of mediation to determine what exactly is the 'media event'. I would argue that this is especially given the scandal and controversy surrounding the report, which created the conditions of possibility for the propagation of new objects, entities, actors and agencies to emerge and to shape and re-shape the object, which became known as the Northern Rock Financial Crisis[[7]](#endnote-7). Kember and Zylinska's analysis is still framed within a particular story - the breaking news story of Robert Peston announcing the Northern Rock crisis on the BBC News at Ten on Thursday September 13th, 2007 - and the event is tied to this story and its' co-performative effects. The liveliness of this media event relates to all those layered histories, discourses, events, objects, entities, actors and agencies that have the potential to be re-moved and put back into circulation by this event; what I call the potential for an event to take on an after-life. I suggest that events are haunted by both the histories and excesses of their own storytelling and that these excesses surface in *haunted data* to be mined, poached and put to work in newly emergent contexts and settings. The method reveals how an event that becomes contagious is multiplicitous requiring analyses that recognise affect and mediation as multiple ontologies.

As well as media-events which are lively or take on an afterlife, Kember and Zylinska (ibid) also introduce the concept of the media 'non-event', in their analysis of the LHC (Large Hadron Collider). The LHC attempted to simulate the 'Big Bang'; the experiment itself did not bring anything about, but was replaced or substituted by animations - repeated images and replayed TV footage - that came to stand in for ' a phenomena or process incorporating multiple agencies' (p. 62). Again in a wry parody of how such animations close down the liveliness of events, they argue that Brian Cox, the Professor of Physics turned celebrity television presenter, 'gives us something to look at' (p. 66; see figure 2)!

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Figure 2 Brian Cox and Lisa Blackman!

**Media Afterlives.**

The concept of a media afterlife becomes more insidious when it is deemed that there is no 'outside' to media 'that would allow for a comparison between media and life' (Deuze, 2012: 62). This is an argument made by the media scholar Mark Deuze who repeats the following refrain, “media mediate everything” throughout his provocative book, *Media Life.* As he argues, media have become 'infinitely intertwined with every single way of being, seeing, moving and acting' (p. 3 This argument suggests that particular technical forms and the imaginaries they enact have become central to people's experience of many different events and contexts; from politics, celebrity, education, music gigs, work, relationships and so forth. It is clear for example that when the former American President, Obama, is photographed whilst on the phone to the Russian president, Putin (during the 2014 Ukrainian crisis), and this photograph circulates in the press and across social media, that Obama is imagining himself as an image that can be put to use in particular rhetorical ways (see Figure 3).

When the former British Prime minister, David Cameron, imitates this and the image is ridiculed[[8]](#endnote-8), one can see that effectively performing oneself in and through the media as a form of political strategy or communication requires careful discernment and management including an attunement to wider contexts of production and reception (see Figure 4). The capacity to imagine oneself as a photograph, made possible by camera-phones for example, and captured in the 'selfie' are testament to such a capacity. However, the ethical question of which contexts are appropriate or acceptable to be abstracted and then made to work within different contexts and circuits of communication is an important matter of concern[[9]](#endnote-9). In the case of Cameron, his apparent misjudgement of his own images’ stylistic and rhetorical potentials, put back into circulation or re-moved earlier attempts to position himself as “cool” that were ridiculed in the media. In this sense Cameron as merely one of the co-producers of his image was unable to intervene and change those distributed, multi-layered sometimes submerged and displaced histories related to previous attempts to persuade and seduce populations of his integrity, standing, charisma and presence. This is a good example of what I call a “scene of entanglement” (following Rey Chow) that draws attention to its own attempts at remediation and premediation (primarily through satire and impersonation) and was unable to anticipate those virtual potentials that haunted this image in fugitive form. These became part of its media afterlife[[10]](#endnote-10). These storytelling projects of the self almost always exceed the intentions and volition of individual (social) media users, revealing or disclosing the hauntological potential of individual media transactions.



Figure 3 - Obama on the phone to Putin during the Ukraine crisis



Figure 4 http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/david-cameron-phone-call-twitter-3211812

The performance of 'media lives' or 'media selves' in this way is often judged through a discourse of authenticity. Even if and when people imagine and narrate their lives as 'media-like' (Illouz, 1997), such performances are often judged for their 'realness' or authenticity. In this sense, performance of selfhood within and across social media platforms is subject to the same forms of differentiation, judgment and reflection, which are derived from an assumed distinction between public and private selves. In relation to reality television, makeover and therapy culture, for example, it has been recognized that the forms of selfhood that are produced for both oneself and others are consensus-based (Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001; Weber, 2009), and that as with other media-cultures they are 'deeply individualized and self-centered value systems' (Deuze, 2012: 245). The distinction between the real and the performed lives on in social media debate and popular discourse. One only has to consider how these debates and forms of judgment and authority have proliferated with the rise of fake-news and the daily twitter feed of Donald Trump, whose own social media practices are used in a continual attempt to authenticate himself as authentic, immediate and anti-establishment. As Deuze (ibid:) asks, if social media have become a primary mode of self-expression or even production for many people, should these be judged for truth and veracity or as different modes of being in the world? This assumption relates to the 'myth of Us - now' that Nick Couldry (2014) has identified as being central to social media analysis and practice; that is the assumption that social media allow the articulation of what we do naturally, and is simply the new way that we relate to and connect together.

As I hope to have shown questions of truth or veracity do not get at the multi-layered and distributed, sometimes inchoate traces, fragments, actors, narratives and agents who can become linked up and re-moved as an event becomes lively or takes on an afterlife. In my writing I have also used the term “mediated perception” (Cho, 2008), which is a performative method that is both an intervention and representation. It sorts, aligns, and makes links across a distributed and scattered array of traces, gaps, silences, submerged narratives and displaced actors in order that one may proliferate visibilities (see Blackman, 2015). I argue that this method is more attuned to the dynamic processes, simultaneously affective, symbolic, historical, technical, that circumscribe mediation, and that require analyses of what is present and absent, visible and invisible, past and present, what is intelligible and what is foreclosed. This method incorporates genealogical approaches to subjectivity and subjectification found in the work of Michel Foucault, which allows a recognition that affect is social, all the way down, right to the bottom. In this respect my approach differs to related approaches, such as Grusin’s, which presume affectivity is primarily pre-conscious intensities that remain in excess or prior to codified representation.

**Premediation and Bodily Affectivity**

Grusin's approach to premediation is based on particular assumptions about bodily affectivity that are recruited as part of new processes of subjectification and subject formation. His approach assumes that affect precedes cognition and therefore represents a more immediate, visceral, intense response than sense making understood as cognitive interpretation. It is assumed that affective responses or resonances are those that exist below the threshold of conscious awareness and therefore have primacy, even if it might be recognised that affect and cognition are inseparable processes. Grusin also draws on the work of the Deleuzian philosopher, Brian Massumi (2002) to argue that affect is autonomous; that is, that it is phenomenally prior to emotion (understood as cognitive framing or interpretation) and contributes to how media *feel* before judgement prevails[[11]](#endnote-11). Thus interactivity or our implication in processes of mediation, are explored through particular conceptions of bodily affectivity, which reframe Silvan Tomkin's psychobiological approach to affect through the work of Massumi, Deleuze and others.

One example that Grusin gives of mediality understood in this way is the controversy surrounding the photographs of Abu Ghraib, which depicted the torture and abuse of detainees by American soldiers at the prison camp in Afghanistan. The photographs were shown in an American news report, 60 Minutes II on April 28th 2004, and were reported and circulated in the New Yorker magazine, which was posted online on April 30th. The photographs caused shock and outrage and were posed in the manner of 'selfies'. Army soldiers posed (often smiling or re-enacting the position of abuser or torturer) next to the detainees, who were sometimes covered in hoods, or made to pose in degrading and humiliating positions. The detainees showed obvious signs of sexual torture. A selfie is a self-portrait that is taken with a hand-held camera, usually a mobile phone or a web-cam and which is taken primarily to upload to a social media site. The term 'selfie' was named by the Oxford English Dictionary as the word of the year in 2013, and was identified that year as one of the biggest web trends with a myriad of social and psychological reasons pro-offered for its popularity. What is agreed on is that this practice is *ordinary* and has become something that many people do as a routine part of their everyday media practice, supported of course by social media sharing sites such as Instagram, Snapchat, Whatsapp and Facebook.

Grusin suggests that the Abu Ghraib torture photographs were shocking, not because of what they depict, but rather because they resonate with the commonality of our everyday media practices. As he argues, 'our everyday media practices of photographing our pets, our vacations, or our loved ones, and then sharing these images with friends, family, or strangers via the same media of file-sharing, email, social networking, mobile phones, and the web, (were) practices which were employed by the soldiers at Abu Ghraib' (p. 65). He goes on to suggest that the 'affective intensity that these photographs evoked as media artifacts preceded the judgment of their political import' (p. 66). He suggests that what immediately resonated and carried the shock and disgust of various publics was how such an ordinary practice of taking digital photographs and sharing them on the internet or by email; the feeling of taking and distributing photographs could be used to distribute sexual torture and abuse. He suggests that this *feeling* was immediately about the ordinary ways in which we are imbricated with technical practices, which we become habituated to (our technological unconscious), and which register in shock, horror and disgust, rather than judgments of their political import and ideology. He suggests that this represents a 'direct affect modulation' rather than the materialization of ideology, for example.

Perhaps this example shows how difficult it is to disentangle affect from discourse/ideology and the potential ethical implications of maintaining such a distinction in the light of such a controversy. It is difficult to imagine that people were not shocked by the content, or that the initial feelings of shock or disgust were to do with a something else, that preceded ethical judgment. Perhaps this either/or distinction is itself a 'false problem' (see Kember and Zylinska, 2012). To separate the shocking content of the photographs from their imbrication with particular technological practices (staged in the manner of selfies to be shared with others), also reduces the 'event' to the photographs themselves. Perhaps what the photographs equally did, as a performative statement or object, was to point towards and intervene within the setting and practices in which these photographs operated. The photographs arguably had the potential to modify the setting, or at least to provoke, animate, enact and amplify some of the on-going issues and controversies surrounding the Afghanistan war. It would be difficult if not unwise to potentially reduce this complexity of relations to the technological practice of file sharing and our non-conscious awareness of our imbrication with such practices. This would be at the expense of analyzing how the photographs made accessible and animated to a general public continuing controversies regarding America and her allies involvement in the Afghanistan war; the status of Abu Ghraib prison and apparent breaches of the Geneva convention; America's Foreign Policy, as well as a myriad of other actors, agencies, objects and entities that are performed, traverse and enter into the setting or “scene of entanglement”. As I hope to have shown this opens to a more “ecological” approach to affect or affectivity, that opens to indeterminacy, potentiality and radical imbrication of the material, immaterial, symbolic, historical and technicial processes and practices. As I have argued if affectivity is considered multiplicitous, layered, distributed and generative (revealing both historicity and the excess of multiple times), then any analysis must start with the assumption that media events or social media transactions are always more-than-one; in this respect perhaps a notion of trans-affectivity is more useful is it presumes a movement and co-articulation across registers, scales and temporalities. The kind of analysis I am advocating is one that requires a complex psycho-social-material-affective account of mediation that displaces psychological individualism .

Conclusion

I hope to have shown how generative some of the new concepts that have been developed to explore mediation within the context of new media practices can be in exploring the affectivity of mediation. These approaches start from the position that mediation within the context of digital and social media is distributed, dispersed, embedded and embodied in complex ways; they are assemblages of matter-meaning-affectivity. Rather than analyse media representations as static phenomenon, these positions acknowledge that mediation is a layered and multi-faceted process where what we might call “media events” are always “more than one”. I have suggested that the concepts of remediation and premediation are useful in drawing attention to the work media *do* but can be usefully supplemented and extended by turning to work on hauntology and transmediality as developed by feminist and critical race scholars (including Avery Gordon, Grace Cho and Rey Chow). These approaches also foreground subjectivity, that is how we are implicated within processes and practices of mediation, but acknowledge we need new ways of theorizing that move beyond a rational, interpretive subject.

I have argued that the concept of transmediality as developed by Chow (2012) helps us to see how media events are haunted by fugitive and fossilized temporalities that move and are sometimes re-moved or put back into circulation as part of processes of mediation. Chow suggests that this potential “excess” can also become the site of strategies of reflexivity that mine this virtual potential to produce new visibilities. The kinds of practices that can be developed set in motion trails and assemblages of entangled relations that can be mapped, followed, attended to, mined and interfered with in order to reveal or disclose what often remains submerged, disqualified or hidden.

In one of the examples I develop, the strategies of satire and impersonation (of David Cameron supposedly on the phone to Obama) show how such intertwining, criss-crossing, and dynamic movement can create the conditions for forms of mediated perception that work across the trans-affectivity of media forms and practices. The approach I am developing is well suited to analyzing mediation within new media environments and is one that I am calling an ecological approach to affect. It perhaps shows how productive the field of affect studies is as it is brought into dialogue with debates on transmediality and hauntology found within feminism and critical race studies.

1. Within these arguments broadcast media are associated with the construction of symbolic power and symbolic meaning and multicast media are often considered more 'real', authentic or immediate, for example. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For readers not familiar with these debates an overview of this scholarship and its importance for understandings of subjectivity can be found within the founding editorial of the journal *Subjectivity.* See Blackman, L., Cromby, J., Hook, D. et al. (2008) “Creating Subjectivities Subjectivity: 22: 1. <https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2008.8> The article is free to download by following the link: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057%2Fsub.2008.8> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. The use of the term somnambulism by Sampson refers to a kind of physiological automatism seen to characterize subjectivity. However, debates in the 19th century oscillated between an understanding that suggestion was lower, inferior and closer to the so-called animal and human on the one hand, and on the other that everybody was “ordinarily suggestible”. For an overview of these debates in relation to subjectivity please see Blackman, L (2007) “Reinventing Psychological Matters: the importance of the suggestive realm of Tarde’s ontology”. *Economy and Society,* Volume 36 (4): 574-596. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. For an overview of hauntology as a method as it has been taken up across the arts and humanities please see Blackman, L (2017) “Haunted Data, Transmedial Storytelling, Affectivity: Attending to Controversies as Matters of Ghostly Concern”. Special issue of *Ephemera: Journal of Culture and Politics* (in press). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Hauntology is often associated with Jacques Derrida (1994) and particularly his meditation on the fate of Marxism following the so-called fall of communism at the end of the 1990's across Europe, which was articulated within a 'discourse of the end'. The refrain that is central to Derrida's reflections is the feeling of time being out of joint - what he terms a 'disjointed now' (p. 1). Derrida sets out to explore this ghostly and melancholic feeling and to conjure and summon the spectre of Marxism in the present by engaging with various ghostings - the ghosts within Marx's writing itself, as well as the way in which fictional writing (Shakespeare's Hamlet, for example) has staged apparitions and called forth, interpreted and interrogated ghostings.

   Derrida's main site of reflection is the spectral quality of language itself, which Derrida mines to perform the different temporalities that language can evoke. Derrida's writing itself is akin to a magical incantation, which calls forth the spectral qualities of language to question what it might mean to live and to learn to live with ghosts. This question is aligned to a 'politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations' (ibid: xvii); to those he goes on to suggest are not present; 'those who are not yet born or who are already dead' (p. xvii). They might also exist as an absent-presence. In my own approach to hauntology I have been influenced by the work of the critical race scholar Grace Cho (2008) as well as the work of the feminist scholar Avery Gordon (2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. In previous writing on affectivity, I have argued that the concept of an *attractor* is a useful way of exploring the liveliness of statements, texts, objects, practices, events, objects, statements and their [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. this is confirmed by a google search of the Robert Peston Northern Rock Financial Crisis, for example. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. https://storify.com/dailymirror/twitter-mocks-david-cameron-and-barack-obama-s-ukr?utm\_source=embed\_header (if the reader follows this link they will be led to a storify by the Daily Mirror of some of the mock photographs shared on Twitter with users impersonating Cameron and making a satire of his performance). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. see the case of a man in the UK who was fined £400 for taking a selfie from the public gallery of a court room during a court case, which he then posted to Facebook. http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2585573/Man-fined-400-taking-selfie-court-case-posting-picture-Facebook.html [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/03/cameron-headphones-what-is-cool-what-is-not> [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. see Wetherell, (2014) for an interesting critique of this distinction and what she argues is its unfounded basis within neuroscience.

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