

“Your objectivity will be televised. Ecology, Economy and Affect in News Media”

1. Introduction

Although the title of this essay is held apparently ambivalent, this ambivalence is nevertheless intended to describe the problematic the essay seeks to examine in the context of the ontogenesis of news media and new media art. The notion of objectivity is brought in here because it is believed to be critical in a trend that has been bemoaned by media professionals and scholars alike, what they dubbed the “commodification of news” in a style-over-substance manner.

As for the reasons of this commodification, there are various lines of argumentation. One strategy is to connect this development to a “lack of diversity in programming and news reporting” which “has created an alienating and largely undifferentiated product offering”¹, whereas another rhetoric blames the “increases in citizen journalism, ‘arm chair’ news analysts, as well as, free online access to print and born-digital reporting”, which turn the news into “a commodity, rather than a scarce resource”². Along these lines is also the claim that although there is an “expansion in the manner in which people access news”, these newer forms of news reporting “can never take over the old” since “the print edition will always be the king and internet sources can only supplement them”³.

From a more theoretical perspective, the ‘commodification’ claim as outlined above is debatable because its methodology and genealogy are inconsistent and its starts with the very notion of ‘commodification’, implying that there has been a time without the connection between media and the commodity market. This perception of news media is flawed from a historical perspective insofar as the first emergence of a regular commercial mail system, out of which the forerunners of the modern newspapers arose, took place during the time of the mercantilist states of Venice. This development also marked the beginning of long-distance trade between European kingdoms during the late Middle Ages and the earliest onset of the Renaissance.

“From the fourteenth century on, the traditional letter carrying by merchants was for this reason organized into a kind of guild-based system corresponding to their purposes. The merchants organized the first mail routes, the so-called ordinary mail, departing on assigned days.”⁴

In that sense, the ‘news’ has always been little more than a commodity, a virtualized system of information relating to transactions of commodity trade and their distribution. Rather than trying to account the news for being responsible of current shifts in the commodity relation towards news media, one has to examine and understand what motivated contemporary culture to regard news media not as *just* another commodity and why some individuals perceive that the commodity relation of the news media has changed in the past few decades. The underlying reason for that is not so much that the commodity relation of the news media towards society and culture has changed due to novel ways of its distribution, which is a case of *cum hoc ergo propter hoc*⁵, but that the conditions of emergence for the commodity relation of news media have undergone shifts in two ways, economically and

¹ ‘CBS News, Case Western Reserve University, and the Future of Converged Media.’ in: *Bytes From Lev. From the Virtual Desk of Case’s VP for Information Technology Services*. Available online:

http://blog.case.edu/lsg8/2005/04/10/cbs_news_case_western_reserve_university_and_the_future_of_converged_media

² Cha, Ray, ‘the commodification of news / the washingtonpost.com turns 10’ in: *if:book. A Project for the insitute for the future of the book*. Available online: http://www.futureofthebook.org/blog/archives/2006/06/the_commodification_of_news_th.html

³ Foster, Peter, ‘Objectivity, in a manner of speaking’ in: *telegraph.co.uk*. Available online:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?view=BLOGDETAIL&grid=P30&blog=asia&xml=/news/2006/04/26/blasia26.xml>

⁴ Habermas, Jürgen, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989, p. 16

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Correlation_implies_causation_%28logical_fallacy%29

politically which affect the commodity relation in general and therefore contemporary capitalist culture throughout all strata and nuances.

1.2. Methodology and contextual background

The claim in this essay is that these shifts formulate and organise themselves in procedures which operate on the basis of affect towards the individual human perception and therefore are able not only to create a mere teleological event or an assemblage of them, but possess self-organizing capabilities which affect their ontogenesis. The virtualization, repetition and recursion of affective strategies create an ecological system, a “climate” of events which perturbate and overlap each other in a way that is no longer clearly traceable on the individual receiving end and in the collective further processing of these pieces of information within the culture itself.

Recent neuro-physiological experiments, designed to shed more light on the question in how far the human body-mind interaction is under the control of will and decision-making, in other words, the linear causality of a mind-body reaction, recorded a phenomenon that, even after the test subject clocked their decision 0.2 seconds before a bodily move, there was significant brain activity 0.3 seconds before that decision, resulting in a half second of total mind activity preceding the bodily activity. It is noteworthy that a half second is the smallest single time unit which is recognizable for the human perception.

“Will and consciousness are subtractive. They are limitative, derived functions that reduce complexity too rich to be functionally expressed. It should be noted in particular that during the mysterious half second, what we think of as “free”, “higher” functions, such as volition, are apparently being performed by autonomic, bodily reactions occurring in the brain but outside consciousness, and between brain and finger but prior to expression. The formation of a volition is necessarily accompanied and aided by cognitive functions”⁶

Against the backdrop of these findings, the relations between affect and ecology should become clearer in the context of their relation towards contemporary news media. The current range of media types and formats in terms of news media and the way the information distribution operates on a commercial level create a complex system of interacting, overlapping and recursive moments of affect which might be called an ecology. This ecology has different operational modes of affect. On the bases of advertising strategies on one hand, i.e. catching the attention of the recipient, be it via tabloid-style depiction of current events in a graphic manner or by creating a bias on the basis of a *Barnum Effect*⁷ (also known as *personal validation fallacy*), as well as the opposite approach, that is, to articulate the new media’s self description as ‘factual’, ‘accurate’ and ‘objective’, therefore creating an aura of seriousness and reliability, one of the traditional selling points of almost any commodity. The decisive shift in the contemporary cultural reception is not so much the quality factors with which the commodity is being appraised, it is more the ubiquity, pervasiveness, repetitiveness and the immediacy in which the commodity relation of news media has changed. It is precisely the over-coding of the news event that obliterates the event as a single entity and creates another ontogenesis of the event, namely the event as an ecology of affect, the perpetual interaction and feedback between the information on the event towards its informational and communicational environment.

It is this clustering and overlapping of informational power relations and the complexity of their entanglement that necessitate a different methodology to be able to

⁶ Massumi, Brian, *Parables For The Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation*. London: Duke University Press, 2002, p.29

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnum_effect named after Phineas T. Barnum, the owner of a sideshow circus in 1841 called “American Museum” in the middle of Park Row, also called “Newspaper Row” in Manhattan New York. The effect entails the assumption that people will give credit of high accuracy to assumptions that are of a wide and general nature, but appear to be custom-tailored to the particular individual. It is worthwhile to extrapolate the impact of the existence of the “American Museum” in the midst of New York’s news media centre at the time and relate it back to the emergence of the penny papers (cheap, yellow-press daily newspapers) a few decades later.

address the phenomena of pattern-forming or the emergence of what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari called a *machinic phylum* and which Manuel de Landa defined as

"the set of all the singularities at the onset of processes of self-organization — the critical points in the flow of matter and energy, points at which these flows spontaneously acquire a new form or pattern. All these processes, involving elements as different as molecules, cells or termites, may be represented by a few mathematical models. Thus, because one and the same singularity may be said to trigger two very different self-organizing effects, the singularity is said to be 'mechanism independent'. "⁸

If the relation of information towards its own environment and the feedback of the human body and the gap in its perception, can be seen as a system which possesses the characteristics of an ecology, then, in turn, it is not too far fetched to relate the informational characteristic, be it in the form of binary language, text, film or even an image, back to the interpretation of the body itself, being one component in the informational flow and contributing to the ontogenesis of media themselves.

“The body is itself an image among other images – in fact a very special kind of image Bergson calls a “center of indetermination”, which acts as a filter creatively selecting facets of images from the universal flux according to its own capacities. The body, then, is a source of action on the world of images, subtracting among external influences those that are relevant to its own interests. Bergson calls such isolated image components “perceptions”⁹

The similarities between Bergson’s conception of perception and the neuro-scientific experiments carried out more than a century later are striking and they give even more reason to argue that one should rethink the notions of perception and embodiment in the context of contemporary mass media in general and news media in particular. What should remain clear as the basic outline of this essay, though, is the premise that taking the pre-assumption to approach news media either from the purely representational or purely ideological side becomes increasingly unsustainable.

2. Literary Review

It is striking, in the classical context of Media and Communications studies, how little research is actually done on the very notion of the medium itself and its relation to culture and its ontogenesis. Especially in the case of news media, the common discourse is centering around the hybrid self-description of Media and Communications Studies, somewhere situated in between classic Humanities disciplines, but operating on a clear-cut, dichotomic methodology of observation and classification and as well as an understanding of causality which is equally linear.

2.1. Graham Murdock et al

In their description of Cultural Studies, Graham Murdock and Peter Golding make the claim that the whole discipline is “centrally concerned with the construction of meaning”¹⁰ and can be subdivided into two major strands, one that “concentrates on the analysis of

⁸ De Landa, Manuel, *War in the Age of Intelligent Machines*. London: MIT Press, 1988, p.132

⁹ Lenoir, Tim, ‘Haptic Vision: Computation, Media and Ebodiment in Mark Hansen’s New Phenomenology’ in: Hansen, Mark B., *New Phenomenology for the New Media*, London: MIT Press, 2004, p. XX

¹⁰ Golding, Peter and Murdock, Graham ‘Culture, Communications and Political Economy’ in Curran, James and Gurevitch, Michael (eds.), *Mass Media and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 71

cultural texts, including those produced by the media industries”¹¹ and another one that “is concerned with the way that audience members interpret media artefacts and incorporate them into their worldviews and lifestyles”¹². Whereas the former, in their own account, discards so-called transportation models and “insists that its meaning is variable and depends crucially on the contexts supplied by the overall narrative”¹³, the latter “has little or nothing to say about how they [*cultural industries*] actually operate as industries and how their economic organization impinges on the production and circulation of meaning”¹⁴.

As opposed to this interpretation of Cultural Studies, they describe their approach as the ‘critical perspective’.

“The critical perspective assumes a realist conception of the phenomena it studies in the simple sense that the theoretical constructs it works with exist in the real world – they are not merely phenomenal.”¹⁵

To deliver a critique of this ‘critical perspective’, one needs to understand the point of view out of which this initial critical perspective is issued. Its notion of materialism, to start with, is originally taken from its Marxist interpretation. Needless to say that Marxism itself is one of the last attempts to deliver a “grand narrative”, as Lyotard calls it. The structural integrity of the Marxist state was historically always threatened due to the central planning concerning the ‘commanding heights’ of the branches of state economy, such as heavy industry and infrastructure. In this point of view, the emphasis is always on the control of the social state to battle the so-called evils and inequality of the capitalist market economy.

"(...) regarding the "commanding heights" that holds the key to the country's economy. The state must have firm control of the socialist structure so that it will be set as the direction of economic development. (...) The market economy, anarchical and competitive, is like the law of the jungle, which is the source of greater job insecurity, unemployment, and social income gaps."¹⁶

This methodology outlined above not only fails to grasp the consequences of a globalized market economy and its information infrastructure in the assumption that the analytic, linear causality with which this assessment of markets is brought up is completely applicable to practical, actual situations -something in which the Marxists measure up to the conservative, classical economists of our time-. It also condemns the modern use of technology and its infrastructure and instead calls for more media control and equal distribution of communication technology.

Any theory or idea that advocates a methodology which opposes or criticises technology in such a way that it accounts technological change as a source of social inequality and instead calls for higher ideals like moral, reason and similar classical humanist values is not only ignorant to the developments mentioned above, its whole morphology of argumentation is also pre-modern.

As for Murdoch’s and Golding’s critique on their account that cultural studies deal with phenomenology instead of “real” phenomena and that their self-description of a critical political economy that is more concerned with real-life problems, it bears inherent limits to allow for the methodological necessity of a phenomenology.

If Cultural Studies are asking questions about the cultural impact of media, it is necessary to account for their ontogenesis in order to apply this to current and actual situations for then to understand how media industries work, for example. The

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.72, my insertion in brackets

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Fuwa, Tetsuzo, *Lenin And The Market Economy*. Lecture at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing August 27, 2002
http://www.jcp.or.jp/english/jps_weekly/2002-0827-fuwa.html

phenomenological exercise is being undertaken not to make practical problems abstract and to move them further away from their origin and their possible solution, but to trace their source by undergoing a process of second-order observation. To blame philosophy for its lack of empiricism and general practical application and its apparent ignorance for particulars is not only yet another example of a post-hoc fallacy, it is also well known problem in philosophy itself.

"(...) because philosophy has its being essentially in the element of that universality which encloses the particular within it, the end or final result seems, in the case of philosophy more than in that of other sciences, to have absolutely expressed the complete fact itself in its very nature; contrasted with that the mere process of bringing it to light would seem, properly speaking, to have no essential significance."¹⁷

To criticise the lack of ideology in the face of the shifting commodity relation of the news media is to try to ask the right questions from the wrong end and with insufficient means. It is necessary to outline the changes in the markets themselves and then attempting to describe the impact this might have on the notion of the commodity. Only after outlining this transitory relation and observing the different qualities the commodity is endowed with it is possible to adequately formulate the question of the relation of the news media and their participation in political communication towards the necessity for a different or 'new' commodity model.

2.2. Shannon and Kittler

Another strand in media and communication studies is less concerned with its social and economical implications and more with the nature of the medium itself. The theories that revolutionized the way we think of media today were daring and novel in the sense that they ignored the content of a message for the time being and just concentrated on the way a message is encoded, transmitted and decoded. This allowed for a general theory of communication which then in turn would be applicable to all instances of media technologies. The bold twist in the mathematical theory of communication published by Claude Shannon just after the end of the Second World War was that he applied the thermodynamic concept of entropy to information theory.

"That information be measured by entropy is, after all, natural when we remember that information, in communication theory, is associated with the amount of freedom of choice we have in constructing messages. Thus for a communication source one can say, just as he would also say it of a thermodynamic ensemble, this situation is highly organized, it is not characterized by a large degree of randomness or of choice -- that is to say, the information (or the entropy) is low."¹⁸

This general and scientific view on information led to an approach entailing the idea that it is not so much the content of a message which is important, but rather its transmission between sender and receiver. This approach in interpreting communication by its discrete level of its capability to transmit and encode information has been picked up by various theorists and philosophers after its initial publication in 1947. Marshall McLuhan, for example, popularized Shannon's idea of an information-based interpretation of communication by coining the famous sentence "the medium is the message"¹⁹ and also later by the German media theorist Friedrich Kittler. The outcome of this way of interpreting information has led to the established idea that information in itself should be regarded as

¹⁷ Hegel, G.W.F. 'Preface: On scientific knowledge' in: Hegel, G.W.F., Baillie, J.B. (trans.), *Phenomenology of Mind*. Cosmo: New York 2006, p.7

¹⁸ Weaver, Warren E., 'Introduction to The Mathematical Theory of Communication' in: C. E. Shannon, *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949 (reprinted 1998) - excerpts available online: http://www.uoregon.edu/~felsing/virtual_asia/info.html

¹⁹ McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. London: MIT Press, 1964,

something immaterial and that the various media are the only material, temporal carriers of information. As opposed to this, an approach of interpreting media assemblages and their simultaneous reoccurring informational emissions, their ecologies, which relates the information per- and received to a bodily experience of affectation has to go beyond the limits of the immaterial definition of information and needs to ascribe corporeal attributes to its interpretational method.

Nevertheless, one has to give Kittler credit to not only publicize the ideas of Shannon which completely transformed the workings and development of technical media and make it available to audiences beyond its strictly formal and therefore mathematical application, but also in terms so far that his theories are often misread and too quickly interpreted as a form of technical determinism. As much as he is concerned with Shannon's mathematical theory of information, he is also occupied with extending Foucault's notion of the discourse and its implications for power exertion which Foucault then turned into political and social critique. Kittler follows Foucault's line of thought concerning the state apparatus and his notion of 'biopower' first, but manages to incorporate the technical media into this theory and finally arrives at a point where he can effortlessly show, in combining Shannon's discrete structuring of information with Foucault's historicism, how power mechanisms regain material quality in the realm of media technology.

"As such, the study of writing systems (*Aufschreibsysteme*) ranges through the interrelationships of the invention of a class concerned precisely with writing as a function of the state (...). In works following this, he moves to explore how discursive practices become hardware, how discourse becomes subject to systems of storage, transmission, informatization, and processing, and how they can be said become both constituted of and operated on by systems of logic incorporated "ultimately" as "voltage differences".²⁰

The difficulty with which a corporeal and synergetic reading of Kittler's analysis is confronted with is twofold. Firstly, the notion which lies at the basis of his definition of information is truly inherited from Shannon, hence immaterial, and secondly, the scientific model which Shannon borrows is that of thermodynamics. As much as Philosophy and Media Theory benefit from these models, they are not completely interchangeable or compatible when it comes to their opposed encounter within these texts, which is also part of the critique towards scientific theory and methodology in Deleuze's and Guattari's work. Furthermore, an analysis which takes a model of multi-causality into account in examining the media effects, can in its attempt criticise a methodology which abides to a functionality model towards *ceteris paribus*, but has, however, be careful. A constructive critical approach should be aware that although there is an apparent reason for a formulation of critique, this critique is put forward by axioms and theses stemming out of the very same context of scientific observation.

As for how Kittler arrives at the materiality of media in a socio-cultural context via Foucault's ideas on the state apparatus, what his theory fails to provide by starting from an immaterial ontology of information are two sub-dimensions which fall under this category. The first one is that by just relating the 'immaterial' information back to its material carrier makes up for its concreteness. In terms of information theory, the cycle ends at the receiver. This cannot solely account for the reception of information via the human body. The 'gap' between the receiver apparatus and its cognitive processing by human perception and the triggering of bodily reactions, is, as we will see later, not so much a disjunction, but a transduction which precisely accounts for the ontogenesis of informational flows.

Secondly, due to the discreteness of information theory, the sending and receiving end are regarded practically as states of equilibrium. They cannot account for a *becoming* of informational flows and moments of simultaneity, resemblance and overlapping of

²⁰ Fuller, Matthew, *Media Ecologies*. London: MIT Press, 2005, p.61

information flows which would be the characteristics to describe media ecologies. In the same way that the body in movement is a becoming body and possesses a twofold ontogenesis which is both corporeal and incorporeal, 'climatic' informational flows in media ecologies are only able to be analyzed in terms of their intensive nature by ascribing the same twofold ontogenesis to information itself. In relation to the transition between two processing systems, the first one being the material and immaterial systematic relations of media apparatuses and the second being the corporeal and incorporeal qualities of human perception related towards its own body in movement, the ontogenetic qualities become much more complex and layered and cross-related in their assessment of potential and parallel causality.

3. Outline and relation of the key notions

Having previously discussed theoretical models which seem to bear limits to the undertaking of the analysis the essay wishes to accomplish, it is now necessary to delineate the notions on which this analysis draws and propose a way to correlate them.

3.1. Ecology

In the sense that the term 'ecology' is used here, it should serve to describe the multilateral relations media technologies have among themselves and also how contextual layering and interrelation takes place within one medium. Media are not only self-referential, they also refer to other media out of which they constitute themselves, which motivated Kittler, for example, to talk about *Medienverbundsysteme*, media bonded-systems.

"This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the "content" of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. If it is asked, "What is the content of speech?" it is necessary to say, "It is an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal."²¹

This idea, however, is not new, but if it is applied in relation to the self-organizing dynamics of the *machinic phylum*, the ability of what DeLanda calls 'mechanism independent' organization of a singularity, the possibility for the formation of media-hybrids and informational cross-breeding out of the inherent dynamics present in the medium itself is taken into account by dubbing it an 'ecological' phenomenon, trying to break up the sheer determinism and taxonomy by focusing on the mediums' creative potential and possibility to change into a new medial form.

One attempt to map the dynamic potential of ecologies in the context of media is the underlying observation that in order to process information, media use a limited set of variables, organized numerically -and therefore in an extensive way- to articulate intensive qualities. In order to capture nonlinear behaviour of any kind, which Deleuze and De Landa describe as intensities, one needs to be able to formulate models based on algorithms. The most effective way to do this is via the mapping of the phase space, that is, to clearly determine the degree of freedom one particular apparatus has and to identify the boundaries of its controllability in the light of the intensity at hand to measure and algorithmically model. The creative process sets in when this way of mapping is combined with a moment of self-reflexivity, a moment of self-reference. In other words, this is when the characteristic of self-

²¹ McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media. The Extensions of Man*. London: MIT Press, 1964, p. 8

containment, which McLuhan describes above, becomes apparent due to a layering, deconstruction or problematisation of the medium itself.

One of the true stratagems of the media is that their self-reference is almost always hidden by what is still commonly described as the “content”, a process which Kittler refers to as “aesthetic of disappearance” a *Ästhetik des Verschwindens*. The disappearance of the self-reference in that case can be seen as the politic of the condition of the medium, giving credit to Sun Tzu’s prominent and often-quoted words that “all warfare is based on perception”²².

It is this moment of disclosure of the self-reference of media as well as the ability to create a mobilization out of the relation of the in- and extensive qualities of the phase space of an apparatus what distinguishes mere media taxonomy and statistics from media art.

“As we have seen above, one history of mathematizations and of machines that may be observed is that of systems grappling with their outside, their virtualities coming into compositions with and forging new “figures of truth”. (...) These are thresholds precisely of material capacity. But, let us not forget, they are also immediately material instantiations of aesthetic acceptability, of cultural, familial juridical, journalistic, erotic and other formulations of reference, representation, money making and so on.”²³

3.2. Body

After having discussed how intensities are incorporated into algorithmic models in order to be able to be captured by media apparatuses, the next step would be to examine how the transition of the intensive modelling attempt within the framework of potentiality of an apparatus is put forward into another phylum of processing capabilities. Within the context of “analogue”²⁴, i.e. human processing of information, it becomes clear why media engage in the “aesthetic of disappearance”. Their function needs to be hidden in order to accommodate the transduction of the ‘natural’, worldly intensity which is encoded into algorithmic quantities and being made subsumable for mechanic, electronic and digital media alike in order to then be induced into the phylum of human perception. The noteworthy thing here is that although the intensity of the outer world has been made accessible to apparatuses and machines, human perception then transforms it into another intensive model by internalizing it into the body of an individual, making it palpable for mind and body alike.

The relation of this intensity transduction can be called *machinic* not only because of the way the human body perceives it or is affected by it, it is also the relation between the two ways of coding which finally trigger the corporeal event. The amount of machinic self-organization is not only reached by increasing the complexity gap within the apparatuses, the disclosure of its potential truly comes into place when it is related to the amount of complexity present within the second transformation, that is, into organic models of intensity appropriation. Only then it is possible to seriously assess media effects within an ecology context in order to arrive at the possibility of outlining the transitional effects of ontological shifting in mechanic, electronic, digital and ‘analogue’ referential frameworks alike.

The media coupling, however, only serves as an onset for analysis and observation and is not meant to function towards an end of methodological positioning. Exactly because the observation deals with transition of intensities, observing the media coupling should rather be seen as a moment of transition within this dynamic field. It is a moment where the quality of the dynamics which serve to express the intensities change rather than a clear-cut point with beginning and end. It is the movement which is of ontogenetic concern. This not only goes for the media apparatuses, but even more so for the organic body and how its sensation and perception is related to these dynamics and movement in general.

²² Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*. London: Dover Publications, 2002

²³ Fuller, Matthew, *Media Ecologies*. London: MIT Press, 2005, pp.83

²⁴ Massumi, Brian, *Parables For The Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation*. London: Duke University Press, 2002, p.43

“In motion, a body is an immediate, unfolding relation to its own nonpresent potential to vary. That relation, to borrow a phrase from Gilles Deleuze, is real but abstract. (...) Here, abstract means: never present in position, only ever in passing. This is an abstractness pertaining to the transitional immediacy of a real relation – that of a body to its own *indeterminacy* (its openness to an elsewhere and otherwise than it is, in any here and now.”²⁵

Massumi argues that in addition to the material dimension of the body, in relation to its movement, there is an immaterial, incorporeal dimension to it. Because the body undergoes a qualitative transformation when it is in movement, this transformation is always to be thought in relation to it. Any attempt to pinpoint these changes onto an analytic or ontological grid would only result in taking the movement out of the body again. This relation of movement towards the thing that moves can also be applied to the dynamics of information flow and its effects and affects. The latter being the nature of the qualitative change the information has undergone before it is transformed into a corporeal reaction. Against the backdrop of a methodological attempt of dynamic intensities, that is precisely the reason to stipulate that information itself is not immaterial, but has a corporeal dimension to it which ontogenetically is always in relation to it. The limited application of cybernetics proper becomes clear at the point where the mathematical theory of communication ends: at the receiver. Whether the receiver is a human being or a machine is of little to no concern to the variables in the theory. What the theory fails to capture, however, is how the information on the receiving end serves as a new onset for an ontogenetic transformation, gaining corporeal qualities and being able to evoke emotion as well as the recursive action of communication itself.

“Extensive space, and the arrested object occupying the positions into which it is divisible, is a back formation from cessation. The dynamic enabling the back formation is “intensive” in the sense that movement, in process, cannot be determinately indexed to anything outside of itself. It has withdrawn into an all encompassing relation with what it will be. It is in becoming, absorbed in occupying its field of potential. For when it comes to a stop in the target, it will have undergone a qualitative change.”²⁶

3.3. Affect

In the same way that Massumi describes the becoming of the body, there’s a becoming of information within its own dynamic flows as well, from the capture apparatus to the sender machine to the receiver machine to the organic, sensitive layers of our body, onto which the thing perceived resonates, bridging the distance of the qualitative transformation of informational movement by an immediacy of self-relation, a moment at where the corporeal and incorporeal dimensions of the converge, transforming its materiality into an event. The intensity which creates the resonance and convergence of the two corporeal qualities (material and immaterial) can be described as affect. The problem of the notion of affect is that it is commonly used as a synonym for emotion, but this is not what triggers the event in this context. Affect therefore happens *before* emotion, it is the first instance of sensation which is the immediate, intensive induction of sensory information to the body.

Every procedural instance after affect serves to decrease and subtract the levels of complexity the sensitive layers are exposed to. In that sense, affect can be equated with intensity. If, in the sense of the missing half second, affect can be said to exist there, before other forms of brain activity like volition, consciousness and emotion emerge, affect gains a dimension of virtuality in the sense that it is too fleeting and quick to be categorized as a past event. It occupies an in-between space between present to happen and future to come, it is virtual. In this field of virtuality, it is possible to have coexistence of apparent paradoxes, folding or mutual togetherness of different time forms (future and past) as well as emotions

²⁵ *ibid.* p. 4

²⁶ *ibid.* pp.6

yet to emerge which contradict each other. In its nature, the field of the virtual bears potentiality, because expressions and actions are yet to emerge out of it.

“Since the virtual is unlivable even as it happens, it can be thought of as a form of superlinear abstraction that does not obey the law of the excluded middle, that is organized differently but inseparable from the concreted activity and expressivity of the body. The body is as immediately abstract as it is concrete; its activity and expressivity extend, as on their underside, into an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential.”²⁷

One way of making the virtual dimension and its affect operational is via the means of politics in combination with media. In a post-ideological world, it is not so much the content of a political message, but what exactly is conveyed on an affective level in the course of political events. The decisive operator in this undertaking is the attempt to capture the potentiality of affect. Be it through an ‘aura of confidence’ or other emotional attractors which have to be kept ephemeral enough to exploit their potential of becoming, of not being there but at the same time being immanent, being about-to-happen. It’s the ‘aboutness’ of these expressions that allow single perspectives to appear holistic and applicable to more than one possible situation. The possibility in this context being a fallacy of its own assessment precisely because affective triggering in combination with single, teleological perspectives distort the framework upon which possibility can be addressed. That also plays into the strategy of reversing the perception of the primacy of the political and replacing it with affective teleology.

“Affect holds a key to rethinking postmodern power after ideology. For although ideology is still very much in us, often with the most virulent of forms, it is no longer encompassing.(...) It is now one mode of power in a larger field that is not defined, overall, by ideology. (...) One way of conceptualizing the non-ideological means by which ideology is produced might deploy the notions of *induction* and *transduction* – induction being the triggering of a qualification, of a containment, an actualization, and transduction being the transmission of an impulse of virtuality from one actualization to another and across them all (...).”²⁸

One way of potentializing this mode of power is through the mass media, automatically inhibiting this potential at the onset of their various transmissions. It should be the task of a cultural analysis of media to look at the conditions of the emergence of potential and its limits, of how it is used as a politic and a stratagem but also how its application is limited by its intrinsic inhibition.

4. Affective Capture in News Media and New Media Art

If, mass media at the same time potentialize the virtuality of affect but also inhibiting it by teleological and utilitarian effects, then it is necessary to take a closer look at how these effects are produced and to what end and to delineate possible counter-approaches.

“It is in collective imagery that media and desire meet, that the same repeated image modifies millions of bodies simultaneously and inscribes pleasure, hope and fear. Communication and desire, mediasphere and psychosphere, are the two axes that describe the war to the global mass, the ways by which war reaches out beyond itself to our own, distant bodies, and the ways image inscribes itself into flesh.”²⁹

The example of imagery in wartime is used here to double the intensity of affect via images by their content in this context. Explicit, graphical display is used here in connection with the affective capture of moving images to raise it to a dialectical level, that of desire.

²⁷ *ibid.* p.31

²⁸ *ibid.* p.42

²⁹ Pasquinelli, Matteo, ‘Warporn Warpunk! Autonomous Videopoesis in Wartime’ in: Narula, Monica; Sengupta, Shuddhabrata; Bagchi, Jeebesh & Lovink, Geert (eds.) *Sarai READER 05: BARE ACTS*. Delhi: The Sarai Programme, 2005, p. 494

This notion of desire is to be thought of as one without a particular object. In that sense, it is not to be equated with scopophilia in the context of viewing. It is not only the viewing, but the affective nature of the media event it is conveyed in. If media potentialize the power of affect, it is due to the creation of a singularity with multiple in- and outfoldings in variation. What is crucial within this definition of potential is that it creates divergences of instances of time – Massumi calls them *futurities*³⁰ – which are *multiplex*. In the case of potential, only these divergences of possible time are reproducible rather than the singularity of multiplex folding itself.

“The multiplex divergence of the singular is not to be confused with the *disjunctive* simplicity at the basis of the system of possibility. The multiplex is in mutual inclusion. Possibility develops disjunctively, toward the extension of a next actual step. Multiplex potential envelops, around an intensely suspended (virtual) center.”³¹

The intensely suspended – the virtual – centre in question here is the body at which the informational emissions resonate to create affective events. It is due to the divergences of the affective potential that the desire has no object, but is rather, as Pasquinelli points out, a desire to belong and to create new informational narratives on a level of *connective* media intervention, “a new design of genres and formats rather than alternative information”³². In this context, the multiplex which Massumi talks about is realized in the connective partaking in the creation of intensive informational flows within media ecologies, co-joined overlapping of reproduced divergent futurity potential.

4.1. Affective Capture in News Media

One example of this happened during the latest military operation between the Hezbollah and Israel in August 2006. A photographer from Reuters apparently faked a picture taken of the Israeli air-raid on Beirut at the beginning of August. It is not so much the outrage about the fact that a news corporation like Reuters with a high credibility is staging or manipulating photographs of actual events, it is more the affective capture of the obvious fake and the hunt for clues back to its origin as well as the participating in the public shaming of Reuters because the picture was manipulated rather poorly and in an obvious way.³³ Although Reuters even admits that they manipulate news pictures in a way to make them look more interesting³⁴, the weblog which initially published the story of the fake gained a large amount of attention and its readers went on a ‘treasure hunt’ to dig out more manipulated photographic material by Reuters³⁵, therefore turning the whole issue into an event of interactive self-participation and mutual partaking of influence over the news content.

“Bureaucratic propaganda wars are a thing of the past. New media have generated new forms of guerrilla combat, opening up a molecular front of bottom-up resistance (...). Video imagery produced by television is now interlaced with the anarchic, self-organised infrastructure of digital networked media that has become a formidable means of distribution (...). Today’s propaganda is used to maintain a connective imagery

³⁰ Massumi, Brian, *Parables For The Virtual. Movement, Affect, Sensation*. London: Duke University Press, 2002, p. 113

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Pasquinelli, Matteo, ‘Warporn Warpunk! Autonomous Videopoesis in Wartime’ in: Narula, Monica; Sengupta, Shuddhabrata; Bagchi, Jeebesh & Lovink, Geert (eds.) *Sarai READER 05: BARE ACTS*. Delhi: The Sarai Programme, 2005, p. 498

³³ the best documentation with the original and edited version of the picture as well as zoom-ins on specific areas can be found at: ‘Reuters Doctoring Photos from Beirut?’ in: *Little Green Footballs*. Available online: <http://littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=21956&only> [last accessed 04/09/06]

Church, Emily, ‘News photography and Photoshop’ in: *Newsblogs Reuters*. Available online: <http://blogs.reuters.com/2006/08/08/news-photography-and-photoshop> [last accessed 04/09/06] whereas the actual comments below the statement are more interesting than the self-justifying press release of Reuters

³⁵ ‘Another Fraudulent Adnan Hajj Photo’ in: *Little Green Footballs*. Available online: <http://littlegreenfootballs.com/weblog/?entry=21969&only> [last accessed 04/09/06]

rather than a collective spectacle, and the intelligence services set up simulacra of the truth based on networking technologies.”³⁶

4.2. Affective Capture in New Media Art

The topic of news media and its socio-cultural implications have also been picked up rather early by media and new media art. An early example which already has the televised event of news media as its topic is Peter Weibel’s “TV-News (TV-Death 2)”³⁷ done in the years from 1970-1972. It is a theoretically interesting piece not only because it stages the death of news media brought about by themselves, but also because of the way it arrives at this message. In it, a news anchor is smoking a cigar the same time he reads the news on television, but, since he is in a closed space, the smoke cannot escape and he therefore suffocates while reading the news. In a felicitous attempt of combining information theory in the medium of smoke with socio-cultural implications by positioning the newsreader in a closed room functioning as an allegory to the closed system of institutionalized news media, it also has implications of a body event since the newsreader himself dies because of the ‘informational emissions’ brought about by the confinements of his function in combination with his location. The piece was broadcasted live and one must argue that the staging of a media *event* via those means of affective capture as much belonged to the performative concept of the piece as the initial actions taken by the newscaster in the glassbox.

Since the availability of relatively cheap recording and reproduction media technology in the late 1960s and throughout their drop in prices in the consecutive years, this piece might serve as an example for a current emerging in media- and also new media art, making politically activist approaches a topic and trying to incorporate them into the aesthetic experience.

“Activist projects in the realm of digital art frequently use digital technologies as ‘tactical media’ for interventions that reflect on the very impact of the new technologies on our culture. A popular strategy is to turn the technology back on itself (...)”³⁸

5. Conclusion

Due to the fact that the ontogenesis of informational flows is intensive, transitional and possesses a potential of divergence, the ontogenesis of mass media effects is equally not simplistic. As opposed to methodologies of linear cause and effect structures, as in the example of Murdock et al as well as the discrete and immaterial assessments of information transmission in the cases of Shannon and Kittler, an alternative approach needs to be taken into account which makes use of the notion of the body as a centre of indetermination and intense suspension. Applying these virtual qualities of the body towards informational flows within different phase spaces of the material and the organic and relating the intensive flux back towards the socio-cultural desire without an object but a desire for interconnection and the creation of interwoven media events, it might be possible to delineate the reach and magnitude as well as the interwoven complexity of media ecologies back to their aesthetic potential.

New Media art which has this as its topic needs to work at the basis of operational disclosure of media apparatuses, deconstruct their inhibiting of affective potential via teleological effects and relate it back to the in- and extensive qualities of the phase space of both the organic and the material systems of processing capabilities. It is then able to open up

³⁶ Pasquinelli, Matteo, ‘Warporn Warpunk! Autonomous Videopoesis in Wartime’ in: Narula, Monica; Sengupta, Shuddhabrata; Bagchi, Jeebesh & Lovink, Geert (eds.) *Sarai READER 05: BARE ACTS*. Delhi: The Sarai Programme, 2005, p. 493

³⁷ Weibel, Peter, *TV-News (TV-Death 2)*. in: Media Art Net, available online: <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/tv-news/> [last accessed 04/09/06]

³⁸ Paul, Christiane, *Digital Art*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2003, p.205

a moment of resonance potential which is directly felt through the body and it further must be able to actualize the bodies' potential as a centre of intensive suspension towards reflection towards its self-reference within the context of medial belonging. Only then can New Media Art mobilize the relation of the two phase spaces of body and apparatus and transform this movement into creative becoming.

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