

Animation and Automation

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Media, Mars and Metamorphosis. Part 3

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Synopsis

In the spirit of liveness, this is more of a background to, than a synopsis of my presentation. My work occupies the boundary between new media, feminist STS and philosophy. Increasingly, I'm interested in what, after Bolter and Grusin, I call remediated forms of writing.

At present, I'm investigating the relation between media and liveness on one hand, and mediation and life itself on the other. I understand the concept of life through Bergson's synonyms of movement, duration and creative evolution. Although there are dangers associated with too much Bergsonism – his largely unreturned division between life and matter, time and space – I still think it's interesting and potentially productive to apply his intuitive 'method' to the study of media. This suggests 1. that we distinguish between 'true' and 'false' problems 2. that we distinguish between differences in degree and differences in kind and 3. that we take time seriously. Media studies, including new media studies has never taken time seriously. The concept of remediation is the closest we get. Because it points to the dynamic interplay between new and old forms of a given medium *and* the dynamic relation between one medium and other media, as well as wider social and economic factors, remediation paves the way for a study of mediation as the underlying, under-addressed problem of (the) media. I'm proposing that media and mediation, though relational, are nevertheless differences in kind. Our understanding of media, and media's understanding of the world are primarily spatial, black-boxed and representational. Mediation, on the other hand, cannot be represented. It is an in(di)visible process (of technology, use, organisation, production etc) whose effects are the familiar forms of media, old and new.

Philosophers like Derrida and Stiegler, as well as media scholars associate media – especially television – with the illusion of liveness. I believe Bergson said something similar about film, though I hesitate to raise this in the context of our conference, and frankly I'd rather not go there. If I was to take issue with Bergson on media, it would be – has been – in relation to photography. Liveness, then, has been linked particularly with television news and coverage of catastrophe. Generally it is regarded as a sleight of hand, but if we regard it as nevertheless performative, say, in the context of the Credit Crunch, then we can not only explore great questions such as 'did Robert Peston (BBC Business Editor) cause the recession?' – we also avoid a reading of media that is overly constructionist and static/lifeless. One of the big questions for me concerns the relationship between events and their mediation. Is it right to say that events are never merely represented; they are always to an extent performative? Then the difference (in kind) is between the performativity of the event, and the event *as* performativity. I'm trying to make sense of this in a comparison between the Credit Crunch and the Big Crunch, aka the LHC Project at CERN, Switzerland. The still very much wished for 'event' of a particle collision is resolutely unrepresentable, yet it is and will be highly

mediated. While the current status of the project is a non-event, there will be no event that is separable from its multi-mediation by multiple agencies from huge magnets to small screens, physicists to the average, albeit enchanted user. Nobody knows what (if anything) will happen, so is this liveness, or is it life itself?

I'm not ready to present this yet, so I'm going to follow through on the implications of Bergson's method for a different, intuitive kind of understanding and communication. This I believe is echoed in different ways by philosophers like Braidotti and Derrida. The work I'll present/perform explores what Braidotti calls a new mode of communication; a return of intuition to the intellect that messes them both up and requires us to recognise, as Jackie Orr and, to an extent, Donna Haraway do, that theory is already a practice (and vice versa). Still very much focussed on the problem of mediation, I'll be playing more with biology than physics, and particularly with the prospect of 'intelligent media'. I'm informed by Lucy Suchman's 'sceptical' work in this area, and by my own previous encounters with AI and ALife. If the life in ALife, the intelligence in artificiality is more virtual than actual, more desired than achieved then it has a certain reality, 'affect' or agency in relation to those who desire – and deny it...