Posthuman Media Studies

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Abstract

In connection with emerging scholarship in the digital humanities, media genealogy, and informational ontology, this paper begins the process of articulating a posthuman approach to media studies. Specifically, this project sheds new light on how posthuman ethics, ontology, and epistemology can be applied in order to develop new methodologies for media studies. Each of these approaches builds upon the foundation of an informational ontology, which avoids the necessity for pre-existing subjects that transmit messages to one another within a cybernetic paradigm. Instead, a posthuman paradigm explores methods that include counter-actualization, modulation, and counter-memory. Posthuman media studies emphasizes the need for experimentation in developing new processes of subjectivation and embraces an affirmative posthuman nomadic ethical subjectivity, linking true critique to true creation.

Keywords: *Counter-memory; Informational ontology; Modulation; Nomadic ethics; Posthuman media studies; Processes of subjectivation*

Introduction

This project begins the process of envisioning a posthuman turn within media studies. Such an approach draws heavily on critical and cultural theory, but insists on an affirmative approach that embraces fully the ethical, epistemological, and ontological aspects of posthumanism, particularly as it has been articulated by N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti. To be clear, this is not an argument against the continued use of critical and cultural theory within media studies, but rather a proposal for a further process of inquiry and analysis that can develop new methods. An affirmative turn within critical and cultural theory is of vital importance, especially because it allows for a belief in and passion for changing the negative, which facilitates the answering of Deleuze's (1969) call to be worthy of what happens to us. Stephen B. Crofts Wiley (2005) argues that this affirmative shift, particularly in the context of its Baruch Spinoza-inspired monist ontology (elaborated below), will help cultural studies disengage from a debate "characterized by endless cycles of deconstruction that repeatedly postpone constructive theoretical development", and instead "shift intellectual energies and academic resources to more pragmatic theoretical and analytical work, to more active and ethical political composition, and to renewed engagement with the public and the popular", (73). Similarly, Tony Bennett (1998) highlights the important effect that Foucault's work has had on the field of cultural studies. Traditionally, the discipline followed a Gramscian model of analysis that was "little concerned with the specific properties of particular cultural

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institutions, technologies, or apparatuses, preferring to look through these to analyse a process (the organisation of hegemony)," (69). However, Foucault demonstrated cultural resources are always already intertwined with cultural technologies. This effect highlights the increasing importance of technology and media in understanding the human condition. When Foucault's emphasis on technology is combined with the monist ontology of an affirmative turn, a new assembled subjectivity emerges that no longer distinguishes clearly between technics and the so-called human, offering a method and ethics that insists on experimentation with processes of subjectivation.

This affirmative approach embraces the relation to non-human forces and focuses on the gradual co-creation of qualitative changes based on the ontology of relationality. It also emphasizes a new way of understanding the non-unity of a self-organizing subject and subjectivity as simply the effect of constant flows of in-between power connections (Deleuze, 1990a). These power connections occur at both the macro and micro levels of the body, and are mostly induced by technology, blurring the boundaries between humans and machines at all levels. These subjects are desiring machines because they express impersonal forces and intensive resonances that demonstrate a desire to connect and endure in the bond of others. Braidotti (1994) explains that the nomadic consciousness has its roots in Foucault's notion of counter-memory in the way that is resists the dominant ways of representing the self, instead insisting that no form of identity is permanent. This does not mean that a subject is a complete fluidity without borders, but rather that it maintains an awareness of the malleability of all borders. It also does not entail moral relativism, which is how many have interpreted post-structuralist and posthumanist moves. Rather, the ethical idea reflects a Spinozist ethics that seeks to increase one's ability to enter into modes of relation with multiple others.

Further, generating new political and ethical approaches from this understanding of the subject, Braidotti (2011, 2013) argues, requires taking seriously Guattari's (2008) three fundamental ecologies of the mind, society, and environment, calling this ecosophy a vitalist ethics of mutual trans-species interdependence. Environmental ecosophy will fully recognize the way that society affects the planet, focusing on the interconnectivity and balance of various systems and networks. Social ecosophy focuses on reimagining the ways individuals live together, from the level of the family all the way up the largest urban centers. Within the realm of mental ecosophy, Guattari is particularly interested in challenging Integrated World Capitalism's mass-media generated subjectivity that leads to "telematic standardization, the conformism of fashion, [and] the manipulation of opinion by advertising, surveys, etc.", (24). This will entail a new understanding of the relation of the subject to the body and the processes of subjectivation. Braidotti reiterates the importance of seeing the interconnections between these areas by understanding, for example, the connections between the greenhouse effect, the status of women, racism and xenophobia, and frantic consumerism.

In light of such a task, nomadic ethics recasts the subject in a materially embedded responsibility for the environment(s) which one inhabits. This entails a shift to thinking that is based in terms of processes rather than fixed entities, on becoming, and on deterritorialization (Braidotti, 2013; Deleuze, 1990b). Practically, this will involve the process of cartography, which entails understanding one's own location in order to unveil the power locations which structure the subject-position, which draws heavily on a Foucauldian understanding of power-knowledge relations. Resistance takes the form of empowering and enhancing what a subject can do (*potentia*). Braidotti (2013) explicitly cites her criteria for this

new ethics of a process-oriented subject that requires a continual experimentation with intensities: "non-profit; emphasis on the collective; acceptance of relationally and of viral contaminations, concerted efforts at experimenting with and actualizing potential or virtual options; and a new link between theory and practice, including a central role for creativity," (191). The emphasis on non-profit efforts is important because contemporary capitalism is itself focused on the production of subjectivities. To escape social subjection within the capitalist regime, resistance and new experiments with processes of subjectivation cannot have profit-making goals at their core. Put into practice, such criteria will allow citizens to participate in planning, assessing, and managing urban environments through access to open source, open data, open governance, and open science, all of which are enabled through one's relation to media. By focusing on these media relations in combination with connections to others, agency is not dependent on the current state of affairs, but is instead geared toward creating possible futures through resources that have been left untapped. The following sections explore how such methods might be used within media studies through the lenses of ethics, ontology, and epistemology.

An ethics of counter-actualization

At the core of this affirmative approach is the process of counter-actualization. Gilles Deleuze (1969) develops this affirmative turn in *Logic of Sense,* where he explains that

> ...to become worthy of what happens to us, and thus to will and release the event... The actor thus actualizes the event, but in a way which is entirely different from the actualization of the event in the depth of things. Or rather, the actor redoubles this cosmic, or physical actualization, in his own way, which is singularly superficial – but because of it more distinct, trenchant, and pure. Thus, the actor delimits the original, disengages from it an abstract line, and keeps from the event only its contour and its splendor, becoming thereby the actor of one's own events – a *counter-actualization.* (149-150)

For Deleuze, an event is understood as a point of change or difference within a series of relations. It is not something entirely new, but gestures in new directions or changes in intensity. An event might be a plague, war, wound, or surveillance, for example. Any event changes the relations among many different series – the multiple arrangements of states of affairs, words or propositions and other events. This takes on a concrete example for Deleuze in the figure Bousquet, who affirms the event by accepting the war and his wounds and even his inevitable death, and then counter-actualizes them by transforming them into a theme for his artistic work. This process requires two steps, but through Deleuze's (1962) reading of Nietzsche, these steps imply one another. First, one must affirm the event by learning to will it. However, affirming is itself an act of creation as opposed to mere acceptance or bearing: "Affirmation constitutes becoming-active as the universal becoming of forces. Reactive forces are denied, all forces become active. The reversal of values and the establishment of active values are all operations which presuppose the transmutation of values, the conversion of the negative into affirmation," (176). It is through this process of creation that the event is then counter-actualized. In the process of creating, one remakes the event, recasting it, like an anti-God, in one's own image.

Counter-actualization rests at the core of an affirmative turn. Where critical theory carefully explores the intricacies of an event by fully understanding and critiquing the current state of

affairs, affirmative theory instead compassionately witnesses the event but moves forward seeking to counter-actualize it. One removes the power of reactive *ressentiment* by becoming-active. This could take the form of Bousquet's artistic re-appropriation of the wound or Félix Guattari's experiments with guerrilla radio. Guattari's work with radio operating outside of state control helped prepare broadcasting facilities that could be used to quickly intervene when special circumstances arose, such as a strike with a factory occupation (Guattari & Rolnik, 2008). This type of radio use inverts its expected use as a receiver and instead transforms, or counter-actualizes it into a device that broadcasts.

As the pace of technological change continues to accelerate, a full in-depth analysis of the problems created by any particular technology becomes an act of history in addition to active critique. By the time such a critique is complete and has moved through a peer-reviewed publishing process, the technology itself has already changed, adapted, and moved on. Affirmative theory more directly inserts itself into this process by seeking to actively influence the changes and adaptations of the technology. It becomes part of the process through experiments seeking to create new understandings of what posthumans can do. Entirely new problematics are generated in this process. Rather than beginning from an assumed static notion of subjectivity, such an approach seeks to understand how posthuman articulations (the combination of bodies and media) generate new processes of subjectivation. It begins with a radically immanent philosophical nomadism that embraces a "dynamic process of unfolding subjectivity outside the classical frame of anthropocentric humanistic subject, re-locating it into becomings and fields of composition of forces and becomings," (Braidotti, 2002, 229). Thus, the nomadic subject is one that is understood as constantly in flux. Not only are fields of composition of forces and becomings explored cartographically, but they also serve as a site for experimentation where one generates new processes of subjectivation as a way of escaping the social subjection and machinic enslavement of capitalism (Lazzarato, 2014). "The subjects' fundamental aspiration is neither to 'make sense', that is to say, emit meaningful utterances within a signifying system, nor is it about conforming to ideal models of behavior," (Braidotti, 2006, 126). Instead, the ethical aim is to endure and to create new connections.

Understanding the subject in this way necessitates a completely different philosophical and methodological approach, including ethics, epistemology, and ontology. Although Deleuze's concepts are certainly becoming more widely used in media studies, as well as other fields, a potential limitation of the work done thus far is that it often uses such concepts selectively, without embracing or sometimes even acknowledging the underlying ontology on which the concepts rely. N. Katherine Hayles explains a particular instance of this limitation in an interview with Stephen B. Crofts Wiley: "The notion of assemblage as a concept is therefore a strong critique of preexisting subjectivity. The way I heard that term being used at the conference [Materializing Communication and Rhetoric: Technologies, Infrastructures, Flows] was something like this: 'We have these intact subjectivities and now we add in some technical objects and now we get an assemblage'" (Hayles & Wiley, 2012, 24). The problem is that these approaches still hold onto a traditional notion of the neoliberal individual subject, while trying to shoehorn in the Deleuzian concept of assemblage. However, one cannot properly use the concept of assemblage in the same way as Deleuze without similarly adopting its critique of subjectivity. Taking seriously this critique of subjectivity requires a new ontological approach for media studies. Deleuzian ontology is born out of the inspiration of the ontology of Gilbert Simondon, which is linked with his project to rethink the concept of

information. Because the concept of information is intricately and intimately connected to the core of the ontological approach of difference and becoming that is central for Deleuze's philosophic project, a posthuman media studies must necessarily grapple with the methodologies associated with an informational ontology, which is explored further below.

Informational ontology

The concept of information is foundational for the fields of communication and media studies. The concepts of form and information play a prominent role throughout the history of Western philosophy, but information becomes linked with the study of communication through its adoption in cybernetics by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver (Sylvia IV, 2021). A cybernetic approach to information focuses on the transmission of information between already individuated entities – senders and receivers – which are almost always neoliberal human subjects. A monist informational ontology, embracing the ontological traditions of Baruch Spinoza, Gilles Deleuze, and Gilbert Simondon, instead conceptualizes all entities as metastable, always in-formation, or rather always in a process of becoming. For example, although we may choose to analyze particular individuals, this must be done with the understanding that such individuals are always metastable, and open to further differentiation, change, and becoming. This ontological system enables an affirmative ethics and politics that is always open to experimentation with processes of subjectivation. For media studies, such experimentation might relate directly to the changing assemblages of humans and technologies. Due to limitations of space, this ontology cannot be fully explicated here, but is developed in detail elsewhere (Sylvia IV, Forthcoming).

Other communication scholars drawing on the work of Gilbert Simondon, such as Andrew Iliadis (2013) and Sarah Choukah and Philippe Theophanidis (2016), have also seen the potential for a Simondonian approach to information to suggest alternative methods for studying communication. For example, Iliadis suggests that Simondon's contributions offer a metatheoretical positionality from which the field of communication can comprehensively address the multimodality of information, communication, and technology. Choukah and Theophanidis propose a framework for studying communication through ontogenetic emergence, which allows the conceptualization of communication without an agent. Within the framework of a broader approach to informational ontology (Sylvia IV, Forthcoming), I argue that we can now see the broad outlines of what this new approach to communication and media studies might look like, while demonstrating important methodologies associated with such an approach. This approach is posthuman in that develops an informational ontology that is ecological in nature, encompassing a view in which humans are only one possible scale of analysis and insisting on the necessity of broadening such analyses to scales both larger and smaller. In doing so, media, and technics much more broadly defined, become one part of such an assemblage.

Posthuman media studies insists on the primary importance of media within this approach, emphasizing its role in affirmative approaches to becoming that resolve tensions between disparates and generate opportunities to critically and creatively intervene in one's own processes of subjectivation at multiple scales. Such approaches align well with work being undertaken in the emerging area of media genealogy (Monea & Packer, 2016; Sylvia IV, 2019). Understood in this way, "the conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of

thinking within thought itself," (Deleuze, 1994, 139). This affirmative approach seeks to generate the act of thinking within thought itself by developing creative methods that afford the opportunity to intervene in processes of subjectivation.

The concept of modulation opens possibilities for one such creative method. Modulation for Simondon is the reciprocal assumption of form between two interacting elements. This emphasizes that the process of interaction is always occurring in both directions at once, over throwing Aristotle's hylomorphic model of one-way molding. Modulation offers an affirmative and creative approach to becoming, in which entities are created through their mutual interaction. Perhaps the most significant shift I am proposing for communication and media studies is the potential for thinking about communications without the need of positing pre-existing agents that transmit messages to one another. Such an approach would offer a significant alternative to the widely studied cybernetic model for communication. This shift has been suggested by Iliadis (2013) and expanded using the concept of emergence by Choukah and Theophanidis (2016). Such methods would open up the study of communication beyond the realm of the human, though it would certainly not exclude the continued study of human communication.

Such an approach begins with understanding that Simondon defines communication as: "the fact that low-energy incidences can establish couplings, amplifying effects occurring between different orders of magnitude in the same metastable system or between different metastable systems" (Simondon, 2010, 60, as quoted and translated by Choukah and Theophanidis, 2016, 294). At its core, communication is the establishing of couplings and connections (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972) which can then cause unexpected and magnified results. Communication understood in this way aligns well with posthuman media studies because it does not require any discourse, though discourse may *also* be part of the communication process. Chuokah and Theophanidis leverage this definition to apply the concept of emergence because they see such a process creating the agents involved in the communication as well as the reality shared by those agents. In other words, the agents did not exist independently before communication established their couplings: "Framed in such a way, emergence has to do with the causation of novelty at the level of the whole, but in a way that cannot be explained by, or reduced to, the pre-existing components or parts," (Choukah & Theophanidis, 2016, 288). This approach has the immediate effect of broadening communication studies to include a vastly wider array of couplings, in which communication can take place outside of the linguistic realm of humans, including non-human and non-conscious metastable individuals that emerge as part of the process of communication. Such couplings might include humans to technological artifacts as well as technological artifacts to other technological artifacts. Once there is metastability and autopoiesis, the molar wholes (individuals) can also *act back on* the connections, guiding them in specific ways (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972). Insect swarms (Parikka, 2010), herds of buffalo, and single cell organisms all offer interesting potential areas of research using a modulation/emergence framework. In the realm of media studies, this opens methodological pathways to better understand mediation which may occur through both signifying and a-signifying semiotics. Felix Guattari (1984) defines an approach to a-signifying semiotics which remains based on signifying semiotics but uses them only as a tool of deterritorialization for making new connections. Pinchevski (2019, 139–140) offers such an example using mediated trauma to argue that media links the transmission of meaning and affect "by virtue of the technological capability of effecting impact in excess of message, and contact in excess of content." Additionally, Genosko (2014) gestures towards codes and

algorithms as potential sites of study for a-signifying semiotics. A posthuman media studies grounded in an informational ontology offers a significant expansion of topics for communication and media studies.

Scholars focused on more traditionally human communication can also find potentially useful ways to leverage such a framework. Iliadis (2013) offers several suggestions for this approach:

> For example, whether we are talking about empirical evidence in doctor-patient health communication or the analysis of vast quantities of data in social network analysis, an individuative methodology would seek to measure, uncover or understand those communicative structures that modulate in the act of communication and that perpetuate by virtue of an individuative flexibility. What variable characteristics of the formal "consultation" setting are responsible for trends that develop in interpersonal communication? How do reflective properties inherent in the visibility of a wiki edit history potentially alter future edits? (17-18)

Another way to understand the social element of this is by tracing the amplifying effects of modulation. Simondon (2010) offers three approaches to amplification which are important for understanding his use of the concept modulation: (1) transductive amplification, which can be seen in his example of crystallization, (2) modular amplification, seen in his example of a triode, which works by adding a control grid that amplifies the energy emitted by a diode and (3) an organizational, or auto-regulating amplification (*l'amplification organisatrice*) that combines modulative amplification with transductive amplification and is demonstrated through the example of the creation of binocular vision. These forms of amplification can also be understood through socially equivalent examples such as (1) crowd effects (crowd-sourcing or -funding), (2) marketing and (3) the self-regulation of neighborhoods (Hui, 2015). Understanding the role of amplification in modulation and individuation can offer an alternative perspective to how communication occurs, especially in the way that a small input can trigger a much greater reaction. In other words, a posthuman approach may in some cases allow for a deeper analysis not available through cybernetic paradigms.

Of all the Deleuze/Simondon approaches to communication, the concept of modulation has thus far been one of the most under-theorized approaches, though it perhaps also offers the greatest transformational potential. This is especially true in the context of thinking through alternative approaches to modulation that operate outside of control society (Deleuze, 1992). This section demonstrates a few potential approaches to using modulation for such research in the hopes of pointing to ways that this concept can be leveraged for future work within a posthuman media studies framework. It is important to note that this approach is not meant to replace research on symbolic/signifying communication or move beyond it. Instead, a posthuman media studies approach would acknowledge that discursive communication is only one way to approach reality.

Epistemology: Counter-memory

Counter-memory as a method connects closely with the informational ontology's insistence on the non-unitary nature of an individual. Foucault defines counter-memory as "an individual's resistance against the official version of historical continuity," (Foucault, 1977, 160). This epistemological process is one of emphasizing forgotten or marginalized histories as part of the process of subjectivation, of constructing one's identity. Counter-memory is

one of the practices which we can employ in order to begin to understand our own non-unitary and non-essential self. It helps us see that we could have been otherwise and understand that through becoming we can still be otherwise in the future. In this section, I show how counter-memory connects to this larger ontological framework and give an example of how it might help us not only understand our own non-unitary nature but also analyze current technologically-infused political debates about social networking. This epistemological approach allows us to better understand the current epistemological divides created by alternative facts, fake news, and post-truth, offering tools for addressing these that go beyond top-down control and censorship by social media platforms.

A methodological approach to counter-memory emphasizes both recording and making accessible the voices, narratives, and knowledges that are typically left out of the official histories constructed through dominant modes of power relations. Counter-memory involves both the affirmative process of embracing our own non-essential nature or disunity – realizing our current assemblage is but one possible configuration—as well as developing the ability to listen to the silence as a way of constructing counter-histories. The first step to developing a methodological approach of counter-memory is recognizing the role that it plays within processes of subjectivation by creating a gap of difference:

> Counter-memory in a sense liberates us from a particular mode of subjectivity in that we come to recognize the positionality and nonessentiality of a particular way of being. Through counter-memory, we disinvest ourselves from the power that a particular constellation of meanings once held over us. By means of genealogical accounts of that constellation, we distance ourselves from its authority. (Clifford, 2001, 133)

A subject is itself genealogical, and by recognizing that genealogy, one can create a gap of difference that allows for new modes of subjectivation.

This counter-memory approach is also linked closely to Deleuze's (1968) distinction between the times of *aiôn* and *chronos*.[2] *Chronos* is the linear, recorded time of what Braidotti (2002, 2006) describes as the molar majority-subject, which uses memory to attempt to hold on to a fixed identity. In other words, *chronos* is the "official" narrative of historical continuity adopted by society. Deleuze uses the term molar to describe codified, fixed forms or identities, in contrast the molecular which is associated with the process of becoming and the lines of flight that escape the molar. When an individual experiences a traumatic event, that event can dislodge a subject from the dominant reality of shared reference points and move them toward *aiôn*, which is a molecular, cyclical, and discontinuous time. This molecular view draws on minoritarian memory, or counter-memory that resists the assimilation into dominant ways of representation, disconnects a subject from a fixed identity, and begins processes of becoming through new subjectivations (Braidotti, 2006, 2011). The counter-memory of becoming minor frees time from the authority of the past. We can keep in mind this suffering only so that it can assist in the creation of a virtual future that develops a potential that was there (counter-memory) but did not make it into the official historical narrative. However, this process of becoming minor is neither easy nor painless. The process of dislodging from the linear timeline of the molar majority-subject and its fixed identity is traumatic. Becomings test our

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[2] John Sellars has questioned whether Stoics really understood time in the way that Deleuze argues. See his *Aiôn* and *Chronos*: *Deleuze and the Stoic Theory of Time. Collapse* 3 (2007), pp. 177-205.

limits and require that we take breaks as we mark our thresholds. Even when intentionally undertaken, such a process is traumatic – perhaps more so if one is thrust into the *aiôn* without their intention. For example, the subjugated knowledges of counter-memories are often relegated to the silence of history, but they can also produce insurrections that disrupt official histories and mainstream perspectives (Foucault, 2003; Medina, 2011). The disruption of these perspectives is itself traumatic because there is an associated loss of bearings. We move out of the anchored linearity of *chronos* into the unmoored *aiôn.*

These counter-memories can also occur at the larger scale of collective rather than individual becomings, constructing a *counter-history* that opposes the unity of the political body. Like counter-memory for the subject, a counter-history also produces a disunity of the political body. Through a counter-history, law can come "to be seen as a Janus-faced reality: the triumph of some means the submission of others," (Foucault, 1997, 70). Medina (2011, 14) extends this: "what was officially presented as past glorious victories that legitimized monarchs and feudal lords as the rightful owners of land to whom taxes were owed, now appeared as unfair defeats at the hands of abusive conquerors who became oppressors and had to be overthrown." It is genealogies, explored in further detail below, that facilitate the insurrections of subjugated knowledges.

Posthuman media studies can highlight the role that technologies play in this process and suggest alternative assemblages. In the wake of Donald Trump's 2016 election as U.S. president, much was written about the role of media in the election. These stories range from the role that Facebook played in the promotion of fake news and foreign disinformation to the backfiring of a media literacy education movement that caused people to question every source (boyd, 2017; Sylvia IV & Moody, 2019). Some critics have worried that the celebrated democratic potential of the Internet has itself backfired, instead creating disparate groups living within filter bubbles that they are unable to escape. Yet, seen another way, the 2016-2017 political climate in the U.S. can be read as a media-centric story of a counter-history insurrection and the resulting backlash of the trauma to majority-subjects. This approach explains how Barack Obama's presidency, along with the rise of the internet, enabled the large-scale spread of disruptive counter-memories and subjugated knowledges. These disruptions caused trauma to many citizens in the United States, who, in voting for Donald Trump as president, were hoping to "Make America Great Again" by restoring their pre-disruption epistemic ignorance.

First, one needs to understand the relationship between majority memory as epistemological ignorance and minority counter-memories. One starting place is Charles Mills' (1997) concept of white ignorance in *The Racial Contract*. Medina (2011, 31) explains Mills' argument as follows:

> Mills argued there that privileged white subjects have become unable to understand the world that they themselves have created; and he called attention to the cognitive dysfunctions and pathologies inscribed in the white world, not merely as side-effects, but as constitutive features of the white epistemic economy, which revolves around epistemic exclusions and a carefully cultivated racial blindness… but this racial self-ignorance also produces blindness with respect to racial others and their experiences.

Black counter-memories are subjugated knowledges and offer the potential for insurrections. Similarly, we can expand this framework to include other minority-subjects such as women

and those who identify as LGBTQ. A privileged majority-subject can be epistemically ignorant to these minority experiences if not confronted by them.

During Barack Obama's two terms as the first African-American president of the United States, the percent of the world population who use the internet doubled, growing from 22% to 50% (*Internet Growth Statistics*, 2017). Obama's terms as president saw the increased sharing of counter-memories via the Internet, and, in particular, social networking. It also witnessed counter-history insurrections that drove notable changes in attitudes and laws surrounding minorities in the U.S., including the rise of the Black Lives Matter organization, the legalization of gay marriage, and increased acceptance and understanding of transgender people. Though this has been framed in some popular media as a case of progressive elite snowflake coastal-Americans pitted against ignorant/racist/xenophobic flyover middle-Americans, this narrative cannot fully account for the disparate world views of these two groups. It is these divergent world views that have fueled a spiraling debate over what counts as fake news. Instead, the counter-history insurrection fueled by the growth of the Internet and the minority presidency of Barack Obama can be understood as causing trauma to majority-subject Americans as they were dislodged from their linear experience of time as *chronos* and forced to see, even if only as a glimpse, the way that "past glorious victories" were actually unfair defeats for minorities. The dislodging caused by this glimpse is painful and traumatic, particularly because it was not sought out by the majority-subjects.

Donald Trump's campaign slogan calling to "Make America Great Again!" can now be understood as a retreat from the trauma inflicted by a counter-history insurrection and a desire to return to epistemic ignorance. This need for epistemic ignorance is so great that it becomes possible to label anything that disagrees with one's former majority-subject position as "fake news." This is perhaps a moment that requires significant reflection from those working within the minority-subject counter-history insurrection of subjugated knowledges, so as to avoid two potential pitfalls – the recolonization of these discourses as they are absorbed into previous subjugations or the creation of a new unitary discourse that is used for its own forms of subjugation (Foucault, 1997). Said another way, one must be careful not to simply create a new molar identity. One immediate conclusion that results from this understanding is that other perspectives should not be silenced (Medina, 2006, 2011). For example, rather than preventing senior Breitbart editor Milo Yiannopoulos from speaking on college campuses during his 2016-2017 tour, protestors may have been better served by working to highlight counter-histories and counter-narratives. This allows the existence of epistemic friction which maintains insurrections of subjugated knowledges rather than allowing them to develop into new subjugations or be included in previous ones.

How does one proceed in the context of epistemic friction? This requires seeing processes of becoming as collective and intersubjective, intervening through the use of imagination:

> Shifting away from the reassuring platitudes of the past to the openings hinted at by the future perfect: this is the tense of a virtual sense of potential. Memories need the imagination to empower the actualization of virtual possibilities in the subject. They allow the subject to differ from oneself as much as possible while remaining faithful to oneself, or in other words: enduring. (Braidotti, 2006, 169)

Affirmative forces can be actualized through the imagining of a better future. Rather than dwelling in the past, we must construct a new vision for a collective becoming. Some scholars

have argued that the filter bubbles created and maintained by social networking sites and search engines are responsible for the divisive political climate in the U.S. leading up to and extending through the election of Donald Trump. In this case, it is the technology itself that is blameworthy, and many are seeking technological solutions. I contend that instead, it is the trauma caused by counter-histories that has created the divisive political climate. Understood in this way, there is no technological tweaking of what gets displayed by algorithms that can solve this divide. Instead, it will be important confront and maintain the counter-histories and counter-narratives of subjugated knowledges as a way to move through and beyond the trauma caused by a collective becoming-minor. Acknowledging this, we can perhaps take a first step toward creating affirmative forces to resolve the tensions between two disparate epistemologies.

Conclusion

I have sought to develop an approach to posthuman media studies that that fully integrates and offers examples of posthuman ethics, ontology, and epistemology when applied to doing media studies. Understanding the role of media in such assemblages becomes a priority for understanding the subject. When conceived in this way, several under-theorized ways of approaching media studies stand out, including modulation, counter-memory, and media genealogy. Other methods for future study could include critical making or citizen science. These methods, combined with an emphasis on subjectivation, highlight a Spinozist ethics of experimentation, the creation of *a* life – always indefinite (Deleuze, 1995). *A* life is therefore nomadic at the ontological level. It is a constant throwing of the dice as we rearrange our own assemblages, recognizing that we are constantly *in-formation* as different connections are actualized at all scales. While critical and cultural studies critiques current media practices, posthuman media studies experiments with new practices and arrangements.

Future work might take a variety of different approaches. Methodological approaches such as communication through the framework of modulation can be extended and most importantly applied through to new examples that help demonstrate the benefit of this framework. Similarly, counter-memory analyses offer a wide potential for application in the age of social media. One important route might consider how big data as material trace can be developed into an archive that is able to not only preserve and store counter-memories, but develop a better platform through which to promote such subjugated knowledges in ways that help drive the process of becoming-minor. Such efforts might align with work being done in the Digital Humanities.

I argue that most importantly, a posthuman media studies approach should embrace experimental *activity*. Understood in the context of ecosophy and informational ontology, how can we create new assemblages that include experimental arrangements of media? In particular, how can we theorize media at ontological scales above and below the human? This activist and interventionist approach requires constant experimentation, drawing inspiration from the future that can be injected into the present. In order to escape the capture of the logics of capitalism, particularly in the form of control and surveillance, such efforts should be nonprofit and open source when possible. All the while, we must remember that the results of such experiments can never be known in advance. Some will succeed and others will fail. But a posthuman media studies method must strive to create new assemblages that offer experimental approaches to subjectivation.

Acknowledgements

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