Life after New Media

MEDIATION AS A VITAL PROCESS

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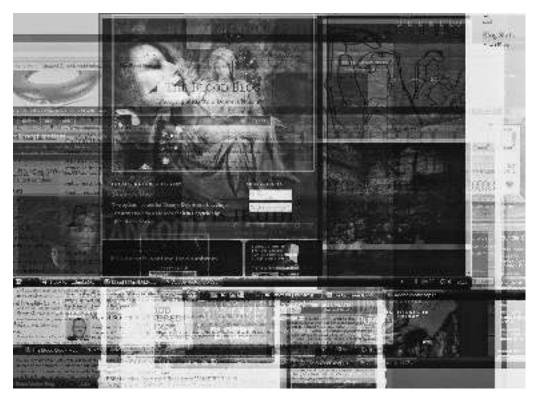
Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska

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Media, Mars, and Metamorphosis (An Excerpt)[1]

The author Jeremy Hoyle is a former student, and at times zealous disciple, of Francis Fuku-yama. His work echoes and extends the concerns Fukuyama expressed in Our Posthuman Future *for the status of human nature in the era of biotechnology and for the rights of the individual in a threatened liberal democracy. Like Fukuyama, Hoyle considers himself a social philosopher, and he too is something of a populist. For his forthcoming book,* Media, Mars, and Metamorphosis, *he has sought out three of the most recent and controversial experiments in biotechnology in order to dramatize his concerns; each promises (or threatens) to change the meaning of human life. Hoyle's chosen experiments incorporate bacteriology, immunology, and what—in the service of rhyme rather than reason—we might call mediology. The experiments occupy different spatial realms that Hoyle considers to be analogous: cosmic space, the interior space of the computer, and bodily space at the boundary between self and other. Each experiment—and this is what makes Hoyle's book remarkable—has already been deemed successful, so the following inventions, discoveries, and innovations are therefore highlighted: (1) an experiment designed to test for the presence of microbial life on Mars; (2) an experiment designed to induce tolerance, and therefore eliminate the need for immunosuppressant drugs, in facial transplant surgery; (3) a user-based experiment designed to test the efficacy of, and future prospects for, intelligent media.*

Hoyle, like Fukuyama, is drawn to headline-grabbing events and opportunities. He wants to be a spokesman for ordinary people who are interested in the changing world around them and who have legitimate concerns about the extent to which those changes are good or bad. Although he recognizes the importance of progress in scientific and technological research, Hoyle is concerned that these experiments have gone too far and crossed the line protecting the sanctity of human identity; that, told from a personal perspective, they may not have been as successful as they initially appeared; and that the experiments have not necessarily produced anything new. The Martian microbe is essentially the same as its Earth-based counterpart; the human body always rejects invasion; and research into intelligent media

has learned the lesson from failed research into artificial intelligence and is now overtly human centered. In other words, these experiments were dangerous but ultimately self-defeating. With the transgressive potential of science thus contained, the ubiquity of liberal humanism and democracy is assured, and Hoyle has the questionable privilege of rescuing Fukuyama's retracted declaration of the end of history through his realization that nothing in fact changes.

What is more, as he progresses through each account, Hoyle becomes increasingly skeptical about its authenticity. Where are the follow-up experiments and observations on the release of the green bacteria/microbe? Why the lack of public response? And why are there no images of the face transplant patient in the media? Finally, the whole idea of intelligent media is surely just an oxymoron. Hoyle's narration reaches this moralist and expedient but not illogical conclusion when events in his own life—specifically, his health—take an unexpected turn. He is forced to add, in an endnote, that he has been afflicted by a terrible stomach bug, the relevant detail of which is that its issue—to the bemusement and concern of his doctors—is

"If It Reads, It Bleeds" (2010).

green. He is also convinced that in the course of writing this book, his face has changed almost beyond recognition. At first he tried to put it down to stress, weight gain, sudden aging (we all know that writing can take its toll). But he doesn't look stressed, fatter, or older. He looks different. Worse still, and this has to be a delusion, a sign of sudden mental as well as physical deterioration, is that the usually inert objects that populate his home have started talking to him—the toilet, the mirror—and there seems to be no way of stopping them . . .

1. This epigraph to the book—which signposts a number of key issues that *Life after New Media* engages with—is a customized excerpt from Sarah Kember's short story "Media, Mars, and Metamorphosis" (originally published in *Culture Machine* 11 [2010]) and a still from Joanna Zylinska's video project "If It Reads, It Bleeds" (2010).

Acknowledgments

Introduction: New Media, Old Hat

In *Life after New Media*, we set out to examine the current debates on "new" or "digital" media. In doing so, we want to make a case for a significant shift in the way new media is perceived and understood: from thinking about "new media" as a set of discrete objects (the computer, the cell phone, the iPod, the e-book reader) to understanding media predominantly in terms of processes of mediation.

The argument developed in our book, as reflected by its title, *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process*, is threefold:

1. In an era when being on Facebook or Twitter, having a smartphone or a digital camera, and obtaining one's genetic profile on a CD after being tested for a variety of genetic diseases has become part of many people's lives, we maintain that there is a need to move beyond the initial fascination with, and fear of, "new" media—and beyond the belief in their alleged "newness," too.

2. There is also a need to look at the interlocking of technical and biological processes of mediation. Doing so quickly reveals that life itself under certain circumstances becomes articulated as a medium that is subject to the same mechanisms of reproduction, transformation, flattening, and patenting that other media forms (CDs, video cassettes, chemically printed photographs, and so on) underwent previously.[1]

3. If life itself is to be perceived as, or, more accurately, *reduced to* a medium, we need to critically examine the complex and dynamic processes of mediation that are in operation at the biological, social, and political levels in the world, while also remaining aware of the limitations of the stand-alone human "we" that can provide such a rational critique.

Yet is this proposed move "beyond new media" not a little premature? It was barely a decade or so ago that a new disciplinary alignment emerged at the crossroads of the arts, humanities, and social sciences that was given the name "new media studies"—although the use of the term "new media" can be traced much further back, at least

to Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan.[2] The first phase of "new media studies" was predominantly focused on technology's function in new media platforms and devices (the use of the Internet by children, the global spread of mobile telephony, etc.) and on a radical division between analog and digital media (letters vs. email, film vs. CCD camera sensors[3]). Understandably, much energy during that first phase was spent on developing descriptions and definitions—concerning what these new media really did, how new they actually were, and how they differed from "traditional" or "broadcast" media. It should be noted that the question of the relation between media and technology was elided in many of those debates, a state of events that resulted in the frequent conflation of "new media" and "new technology." Media also tended to become equated with the computer—or, to cite Lev Manovich, "media became new media"[4]—thus erasing the specificities of, and distinctions between, existing old and new media. Entities such as data and information, and processes such as interactivity, convergence, and digitization, became the focus of the rapidly developing discipline of "new media studies."

Many theorists of new media have attempted to make a mark in this emerging field by setting themselves against its earlier definitions and proposing ways to move on and beyond them. For example, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, one of the editors of the anthology *New Media, Old Media*, argues against a noncritical adoption of the "new media" term by saying, "The moment one accepts new media, one is firmly located within a technological progressivism that thrives on obsolescence and that prevents active thinking about technology-knowledge-power."[5] Yet Chun does not recommend abandoning the term altogether. Instead, she recognizes that "new media" has already been consolidated into a field with its own emerging canon and institutional space. At the same time, Chun argues strongly against perpetuating the myth of the singular uniqueness of new media, insisting instead that the new "contains within itself repetition."[6] To a certain extent, it can be argued that "new media" was already born as a problem, and that the majority of the theorists who have used this term have always done so somewhat reluctantly, with a sense of intellectual compromise they are having to make if they want their contribution to be recognized as part of a particular debate around technology, media and newness. Through running the master's program in Digital Media at Goldsmiths, University of London, and through working on our own publications in the field of "new media studies,"[7] we have become increasingly aware of both the disciplinary seductions and the conceptual limitations of this term.

Generally speaking, scholarship in media studies fits into two methodological frameworks. Those from the social sciences and communications-based disciplines typically approach the media through a mixture of empirical research and social

theory, with questions of political structures, economic influences, social effects, and individual agencies dominating the debate. Those from the humanities in turn predominantly focus on what different media "mean"; that is, they tend to look at media as texts and at their cultural contexts. Of course, there are also those who have never felt comfortable to be pigeonholed in this way and for whom questions of language and materiality, of culture and politics, have always needed to be studied together. (Work undertaken from the perspective of the actor-network theory influenced by Bruno Latour, of the materialist philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, and of science and technology studies has contributed toward blurring the distinctions between the two frameworks, or "camps.")

It is at this point that we enter the debate on new media in our book. However, our aim in *Life after New Media* is to do something other than merely provide an extension or corrective to the current field of "new media studies." Instead of developing an alternative definition or understanding of new media, we propose to refocus the new media debate on a set of processes that have so far escaped close analysis by media studies scholars. In other words, with this book we are not so much interested in moving the debate on new media *on*, but rather in moving on *from* the debate on new media and, in doing so, focusing on the concept of mediation. The distinction is of course primarily heuristic—that is, provisional and strategic—and the purpose of separating mediation from media will be to clarify the relation between them. Mediation does not serve as a translational or transparent layer or intermediary between independently existing entities (say, between the producer and consumer of a film or TV program). It is a complex and hybrid process that is simultaneously economic, social, cultural, psychological, and technical. Mediation, we suggest, is all-encompassing and indivisible. This is why "we" have never been separate from mediation. Yet our relationality and our entanglement with nonhuman entities continues to intensify with the ever more corporeal, ever more intimate dispersal of media and technologies into our biological and social lives. Broadly put, what we are therefore developing in *Life after New Media* is not just a theory of "mediation" but also a "theory of life," whereby *mediation becomes a key trope for understanding and articulating our being in, and becoming with, the technological world, our emergence and ways of intra-acting with it, as well as the acts and processes of temporarily stabilizing the world into media, agents, relations, and networks.*

Our theoretical inspiration for this argument predominantly comes from the work of two philosophers: Henri Bergson (and the materialist-vitalist philosophy subsequently developed by Deleuze) and Jacques Derrida (and his deconstructive thinking around concepts, processes and the ethicopolitical nexus). It is with Bergson and

Derrida that we start approaching media as a series of processes of mediation. This entry point will take us toward the examination of the temporal aspects of media—its liveness (or rather, lifeness),[8] transience, duration, and frequently predicted death. Our primary reason for turning to Bergson is that he allows us to raise questions about the more traditional perception of media as a series of spatialized objects (the iPod, the computer) and also about mediation—that is, multiple, entangled processes of becoming. However, we have to bear in mind that the process of mediation is also a process of *differentiation*; it is a historically and culturally significant process of the temporal stabilization of mediation into discrete objects and formations. In the encounter with Bergson's notion of "creative evolution," Derrida's notion of "différance" functions as a kind of interruption or "cut" to the incessant flow of mediation, facilitating as it does the discussion of the symbolic and cultural significance of this interruption. The negotiation between the Bergsonian (or perhaps, more appropriately, Bergsonian-Deleuzian) and the Derridean philosophical traditions is nevertheless of interest to us here only as far as it allows us to think, move with, and respond to the multiple flows of mediation. It is not therefore an intellectual exercise in its own right, just as the book is not *about* Bergson, Deleuze, or Derrida in any straightforward way. Our attempt to read media as "mediation," both critically and creatively, is informed by a rigorous playfulness toward philosophy, borrowed from the long line of feminist critical thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Karen Barad, or, indeed, from Bergson, Deleuze, and Derrida themselves. As well as drawing, specifically, on Bergson's intuitive method, we recognize our allegiance to what Braidotti terms a "nomadic, rhizomatic logic of zigzagging interconnections."[9] The latter logic manifests respectful irreverence toward one's predecessors. Resisting the injunction to speak in our masters' or mistresses' voices, we are therefore seeking methods of thinking and writing that can allow us to see and make a difference.

One of the central issues that concern us in this study of the temporal aspects of media is the relation between events and their mediation. Our argument is that events are never merely presented and *re*presented in the media, and that any such representations are always to an extent performative. Philosophers such as Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, as well as many media scholars, associate media—especially television—with the *illusion* of liveness. Liveness is particularly linked with television news and the coverage of disaster and catastrophe. Generally, it is regarded as a sleight of hand. Yet if we regard such illusory liveness as performative—that is, as being able, to an extent, to bring about the things of which it speaks; things such as "the credit crunch" or "war on terror," say—then not only will we be able to explore questions such as "Did Robert Peston (BBC Business Editor) cause the recession in the UK?" but we will

also avoid a reading of media that is overly constructionist, static, and—ultimately—lifeless.

As a continuation of the previous argument, we suggest that mediation gives us insight into *the vitality of media*. By the latter, we mean something more than just the *liveness* of media that we know about through television studies of catastrophes and other "newsworthy" occurrences. We are referring instead to the *lifeness* of media—that is, the possibility of the emergence of forms always new, or its potentiality to generate unprecedented connections and unexpected events. This issue raises the following set of questions for us: if we are saying that the events we have looked at are, to differing extents and in different ways, performed through their mediation, then how should we respond to them in our critiques? Are our critiques not also forms of invention? Or, more broadly, can we think of a way of "doing media studies" that is not just a form of "media analysis" and that is simultaneously critical *and* creative? Could it allow us to challenge the opposition between "media theory" and "media practice" that many university media departments have adopted somewhat too comfortably over the years, at worst privileging one over the other, at best aiming at some kind of dialectical resolution that in the end only reaffirms the division?

In the light of such an argument, any attempt to root media analysis in fixed entities such as "the social," "subjectivity," "economy," "politics," or "art" must therefore be seen as nothing more than a pretense. It is not that many traditional forms of media analysis do not recognize the need for this pretense. Nevertheless, what *Life after New Media* argues is lacking in many such analyses is a serious engagement with the consequences of this recognition, in ways that would be both critically rigorous and adventurously inventive. This is perhaps an appropriate moment to insert a personal double confession into our introduction. The writing of this book has coincided for us with the consolidation of our longstanding ambition to enact knowledge production and media production differently: Sarah Kember has a literary agent and has published her first novel, *The Optical Effects of Lightning*, and Joanna Zylinska has completed a master's degree in fine art photography and started exhibiting her work. Yet at the same time, these incursions into what academic conventions traditionally designate as "practice" have reaffirmed our commitment to rigorous scholarship and to attentive readings of texts and concepts—even if they have pushed further our desire for experimentation and boundary crossing. By drawing on different instances of media enactment, we thus hope to have outlined in this book a more dynamic, networked, and engaged mode of working on, in, and with "the media," in which critique is always already explicitly accompanied by the work of participation and invention. *Life after New Media* closes off with our proposal for "creative mediation"

understood as a mode of "doing media studies" otherwise. The book thus emerges out of a complex system of intertwined intellectual, social, economic, and artistic influences that have been shaping the interdisciplinary field of new media studies for nearly two decades now and that have been shaping us as scholars, writers, and teachers within this field. It is an experiment in producing knowledge differently, in exercising academic borrowing and hospitality, in asking questions about "media production" of both ourselves and others, in literally writing and thinking in multiple voices and tongues. As well as providing a name for the ever changing mediascape, mediation for us stands for this dynamic entanglement of ideas, voices, and minds.

Chapter 1 makes a case for a shift from thinking about "new media" as a set of discrete objects to understanding media, old and new, in terms of the interlocked and dynamic processes of mediation. It also outlines what is at stake in this shift from thinking about media solely as objects of use, to recognizing our entanglement with media not just on a sociocultural but also on a biological level. Introducing the work of the philosophers Martin Heidegger and Bernard Stiegler, we read mediation as an intrinsic condition of being-in and becoming-with the technological world. We then offer to see mediation as the underlying, and underaddressed, problem of the media.

If "the media narrate ordinary life by anticipating it, with such force that its story of life seems ineluctably to precede life itself," for the philosopher Bernard Stiegler, public life is actually "produced by these [media] programs."[10] Chapter 2 focuses on two media "events," or "crunches," that are linked by the prospect of global or even cosmic disaster: the "credit crunch" of 2007–2009 and the "big crunch," otherwise known as the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) Project at CERN, Switzerland. Although the latter was purposefully designed in 2008 with a view to recreating the conditions that prevailed immediately after the Big Bang, public apprehension has centered on the possibility that black holes will be formed, signaling the end of the world. As the experiment in particle physics that stresses the contiguous nature of space-time at the origin of life, the universe and everything else, the LHC project offers perhaps the *definitive event* by means of which we might effectively intuit the process of mediation—or the existence of life after new media.

Since the event of mediation is, like time (or, indeed, life itself), both invisible and indivisible, any attempt at its representation must ultimately fail. In chapter 3, we offer a challenge to representationalism by looking at photography, its historical ambitions, and its various techniques. Photography is understood here as a process of cutting through the flow of mediation on a number of levels: perceptive, material, technical, and conceptual. The recurrent moment of the cut—one we are familiar with not just via photography but also via film making, sculpture, writing, or, indeed, any

other technical practice that involves transforming matter—is posited here as both a technique (an ontological entity encapsulating something that *is*, or something that *is taking place*) and an ethical imperative (the command: "Cut!"). The key question that organizes our argument is therefore as follows: if we must inevitably cut, and if the cut functions as an intrinsic component of any creative, artistic, and especially photographic practice—although this is still only a hypothesis—then what does it mean to *cut well*? In introducing a distinction between photography as a practice of the cut and photographs as products of this process of cutting, we also aim to capture and convey the vitality of photographic movements and acts.

Chapter 4 compares media visions of the transnational or even cosmic future discussed in the earlier chapters with the viewing point of the domestic present. Arguably, our homes, like our bodies, have always functioned as "intelligent" media. They foreground location and identity as a counterforce to dislocation and differentiation. This set of associations is clearly reflected in the idea of "the smart home," which is embedded with networked computational objects and speech-based autonomous agents who travel so that we can remain in place, safe and protected from a hostile environment. The smart home promises mobility without movement, and fulfills "a long-standing dream of artifacts that know us, accompany us"[11] and comfort us. Intelligent mediation, centered increasingly on the home, is not, as it is sometimes presented, about celebrating hybrid human-machine agency. It is more about positioning "us" as threatened but ultimately reassured subjects, with our private, individualized patterns of media consumption. We argue that intelligent mediation thus becomes a facet of neoliberalism, functioning as the reinforcement of self-interest in the face of both alterity (of what, in a cosmic sense, we might become) and adversity (or what, in the more immediate economically prescribed future, might become of us).

In our attempt to envisage different sociopolitical contexts and different futures, in chapter 5 we explore the possibilities of a less conservative, more inventive approach to the mediated self. It is premised upon a rupture with neoliberal logic and with the reaffirmation of a unitary, autonomous, and authentic subject—a rupture enacted by taking the issue of time and its passage more seriously. The prospect of self-mediation also redefines stability in terms of the inevitable limitations of becoming. In this chapter, we will explore the limitations of transformative self-mediation through a reading of cosmetic surgery (including extreme surgical transformations and the normalizing role of makeover TV shows) and face transplant surgery. Our reading is consistent with a posthumanist, particle physics–based approach informed by theorists such as Karen Barad. If facial surgery is an instance of biotechnological self-mediation writ large, because it is literally inscribed on the body as a medium, then

self-mediation is a process that moves "us" both home and away, consolidating and authenticating our experience even as it extends and imperils our identity.

Chapter 6 pursues the ethical implications of this ultimate instability and transience of the mediated cultural subject. It investigates what exactly is entailed in the recognition that "nobody and no particle of matter is independent and self-propelled, in nature as in the social."[12] It also asks what moral frameworks become available within the context of ongoing dynamic mediation, and whom ethical responsibility concerns if we are all supposedly "becoming Facebook" (no matter whether we are "on" it or not). In the light of the above, we outline what we term "an ethics of mediation"—which, in line with our expanded understanding of mediation as a way of being and becoming in the technological world, with all its biodigital configurations—can also be dubbed "an ethics of life."

Positioned as a kind of critical summary, chapter 7 engages with the idea of "creativity" in the context of both life's supposed creative potential and the work on creativity from the context of creative industries, in preparation for our attempt to offer a different mode of doing critical work "after new media." Such a mode is indicated in Bergson's intuitive method and is echoed in the work of many feminist philosophers. The second part of this chapter adopts the format of a "live essay" in which one of the crucial oppositions in media studies—that between "theory" and "practice"—becomes a subject not only of critical interrogation but also of a performative event. Drawing on our own media practices (creative writing and photography, respectively), we hope in this way to have taken some steps toward enacting, rather than just proposing, "life after new media."

1 Mediation and the Vitality of Media

False Problems and False Divisions

This chapter makes a case for a shift from thinking about "new media" as a set of discrete objects to understanding media, old and new, in terms of the interlocked and dynamic processes of mediation. It also outlines what is at stake in this shift from thinking about media solely as things at our disposal to recognizing our entanglement with media on a sociocultural as well as biological level. This argument will lead us to pose the following question: if media cannot be fully externalized from subjects, or "users," then how might "we" engage with "them" differently? We will also consider the political and ethical implications of such engagements.

After outlining the key debates on new media within media, communications, and cultural studies, we will turn to the work of philosophers Martin Heidegger and Bernard Stiegler to explore the relationship between "media" and "technology" and to advance a proposition that mediation is an intrinsic condition of being-in, and becoming-with, the technological world. With this proposition, we will offer to see mediation as the underlying, and underaddressed, problem of the media. As the role of this chapter is first of all to provide a theoretical framework—a toolbox of concepts we will be working with throughout the course of this book—we will also seek to distinguish between the question of mediation and the question of media. This distinction is primarily heuristic—that is, tentative and pragmatic—and the purpose of separating mediation from media will be to clarify the relation between them. Henri Bergson's philosophical method of division and reintegration, as reappropriated by Gilles Deleuze, will be of particular use to us here. This "method" proposes three things: (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 consider the object of our inquiry in terms of its temporality.[1] This last law, or rule,

is the most important one for Bergson, and it will be the principal means by which we will seek to distinguish between media and mediation.

Having offered a preliminary investigation of the concept of mediation, we will then present mediation as the underlying and underaddressed problem of the media. We will do so by highlighting, and then bracketing, the "false" problems and false divisions associated with debates on new media. To continue with our use of the Bergsonian heuristic, these problems and divisions are "false" not in any ontological sense related to some originary idea of truth, but rather because they limit the understanding of the complex and multifaceted phenomena and processes by imposing clear-cut distinctions and categories all too early. This process of fragmenting the world into particular categories, often arranged into sets of oppositions, is not only reductive and therefore unhelpful; it also has serious political and ethical consequences for our understanding of the world, its dynamics, and its power relations. Thinking through and against such false problems and oppositions is therefore also a political intervention into "the media"—one that is different from studies of the political economy of media and communications, for example, but that is not any less serious or important.[2] In addition to the false problems (which we identify in discussions on new media that focus on a singular problem, such as newness, digitization, interactivity, convergence, or data, at the expense of all the others), the field of new media is arguably also marred by a number of "false divisions"—or what cultural theorists trained in poststructuralist thought tend to refer to as "binary oppositions." Such false divisions that have so far shaped debates in new media studies include determinism and constructionism; technology and use; theory and practice; structure and agency; information and materiality (an extension of the division between language and materiality); and subjectivity and objectivity.

Even where these false divisions have been identified as such—and of course many writers are aware of their limited currency—it has proven difficult to avoid them.[3] The reason for this difficulty partly lies with the residual effects of disciplinarity and the associated requirement to take a set of key concepts within a given discipline and then elevate them to a transcendental position, as a result of which everything else gets questioned or even dismantled except for these foundational concepts (for example, "data" and "information" in computer science; "subjectivity" in psychology; "society" in sociology). Another reason for the survival of such false divisions lies perhaps in the prevalence of social science perspectives in media, communications, and cultural studies, perspectives that are fundamentally positivist and humanist, and that stake empirical claims on partial perspectives of "black-boxed"—that is, isolated, protected, and simultaneously obscured—aspects of the media. "Politics" and "the social" are

just two examples of such privileged terms within the dominant, social sciences–informed tradition of media and communications.

Our own argument in the book is that although *media constitute differences in degree*[4] that should not be elided under any overarching concept, *mediation* nevertheless *constitutes a difference in kind*. It cannot be isolated and hence stabilized in any straightforward manner because its mode is fundamentally that of time. The interdisciplinary nexus of media, communications, and cultural studies—within which questions of new media are most readily addressed—has not so far offered an adequate account of mediation as a process because it has not taken the temporality of media seriously. We aim to address this rather substantial shortcoming in the pages that follow. This chapter will end with a proposition to see mediation as the expression of media temporality, or what we will term the "lifeness" of media.

"What Is New about New Media?" and a Few Other Old Debates

Many commentaries on emerging media—"Everyone who is anyone is on Facebook!"; "Apple has revealed an iPad!"; "the Internet causes obesity in children!"—tend to fall into one of the two extremes: technophilia or technophobia, utopianism or dystopianism, that is, either a celebration of or cynicism about the advent of the supposedly new. Similar sentiments, albeit articulated in a more restrained manner, tend to inform a high number of academic arguments about new media and their supposed influence. This limited dualism, or simple binary or oppositional thinking, is not, however, restricted to *feelings about* new media: it also structures many *ontological conceptualizations of* them (analog vs. digital, closed vs. open, centralized vs. distributed, readerly vs. writerly, mass vs. participatory). The majority of debates on new media thus tend to perpetuate the "false divisions" discussed previously. The old versus new division plays a special role among those oppositions in that it not only brings together affect and matter but also inscribes media into a progressive developmental narrative. In other words, it introduces the question of time into debates on media while simultaneously freezing this question by immediately dividing "media time" into a series of discrete spatialized objects, or products that succeed one another. Thus we are said to progress *from* photography *to* Flickr, *from* books *to* e-readers.

As mentioned in the introduction, the alleged "newness" of the products and processes that get described as "new media" should not be taken at face value—not only because of the rather problematic historical trajectory of progressive media development this narrative adopts, as persuasively argued by Lisa Gitelman in *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*,[5] but also due to the ideological

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