



Recording (for) the Emergent Future,  
or Data and Experience in 21st Century Media • Mark Hansen

## RECORDING (FOR) THE EMERGENT FUTURE, OR DATA AND EXPERIENCE IN 21ST CENTURY MEDIA

Many critics of contemporary culture have drawn attention to the myriad ways in which social media and wireless computing are currently reshaping how we experience ourselves and our relatedness to the worlds in which we live and the environments that encompass us. To such critics, who may equally well be neuroscientists as literary scholars, web 2.0 sites and mobile devices form part of the technical infrastructure of contemporary life which, despite a general acceleration and a massive spatial expansion, continues to center around the circulation of information and entertainment.

On such a view, what we do with our cell phones or our ipads differs more in degree than in kind from what we used to do with analog telephones or televisions: in all cases, the function of mediation is to facilitate communication and deliver entertainment, or (from what is perhaps a more scholarly, if also more technical perspective) to broker the transmission of information from sender to receiver and to transmit stored information in order to facilitate new opportunities for reception of the past in the present.

With its focus on the content of recorded and transmitted information, what this prevalent view fails to entertain is the experiential impact of social media, wireless computing and other applications of the new computational paradigm central to technical mediation in our world today. From the perspective of experiential impact, 21st century media differ markedly – that is, in kind – from 20th century media: specifically, they operate on a temporal background that owes more to the microtemporality of computation (and perhaps, as if in recompense, of neural processing) than to the macrotemporality of what phenomenologists from Husserl on have called “lived experience” [Erlebnis].

In addition to providing new, more convenient because more ubiquitous and more portable, means for transmitting and accessing media content, 21st century media broker a fundamental shift in the mode of access not just to that content but to the experience that it mediates. Specifically, 21st century media no longer records human experience as content – that is, the contents of consciousness – as photography and film once did (and arguably still do); on the contrary, with its much expanded capacities for recording and its microtemporal operation, today’s media captures the underlying data, both bodily and environmental, from which such content emerges (via selection) and which remains primary to it. And it records such data, not to store it for re-presentification of the past, but rather to facilitate future-oriented action in the future-directed present.

What this means is that, with the advent of 21st century media, media becomes for the first time, at least as a nonexceptional element of everyday life, an instrument for exploring – and also for expanding and intensifying – the texture of embodied living as it happens, which is to say, prior to the abstraction that yields conscious experience. What is more, media ceases to focus narrowly on human conscious experience and on the objectification of that experience and

becomes liberated to capture what, with Whitehead, we could call the “cosmological situation” from which consciousness is only a late, much reduced, and relatively unimportant (in terms of causality) emergence.

In my talk, I presented a post-phenomenological account of sensation as the correlate of this new paradigm of media or recording for the emergent future. Focusing on concrete artworks and media phenomena, I tried to demonstrate how this theoretical perspective allows us to grasp the specificity of 21st media as an opportunity both to understand our own experience from a perspective not beholden to consciousness and to influence how that experience may develop in the future.

#### Creativity and Mediation from Husserl to Whitehead and Back

In this shorter, more methodologically-focused presentation, I turned to the issue of creativity at the crossroads between phenomenological/post-phenomenological accounts of experience and 21st century media.

I began with a brief overview of the problem of creativity (the emergence of the new) in the age of ubiquitous mediation, where I explored the difficulty of imagining a future that is not modeled on – and thus unduly constrained by – past experience. I then sketched a lineage of philosophical efforts to couple creativity and media beginning with Husserl's late efforts to liberate protention from its initial symmetrical correlation with retention (in the lectures on time consciousness). In addition to Husserl, I explicated the contributions that Eugen Fink, Jan Patocka, Bernard Stiegler, Gilbert Simondon, and A. N. Whitehead make to resolving the problem of the new and I ended by suggesting a supplementation of Whitehead's conception of creativity that finds its source in Husserl's late work on (the limits of) time-consciousness and the ensuing (if never fully recognized) necessity to think worldly time as primary in relation to the time of consciousness.



## ABOUT MARK HANSEN

Mark Hansen teaches cultural theory and comparative media studies in the Program in Literature and the Department of Art, Art History and Visual Studies at Duke University where he is also affiliated with the Program in Information Science + Information Society, Arts of the Moving Image and the Visual Studies Initiative. Hansen is author of *Embodying Technesis: Technology Beyond Writing* (Michigan 2000), *New Philosophy for New Media* (MIT 2004), and *Bodies in Code* (Routledge 2006), as well as numerous essays on cultural theory, contemporary literature, and media. He has co-edited (with Taylor Carman) *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*. Two volumes have recently appeared: *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (Chicago 2010), a resource for the study of media, co-edited with W.J.T. Mitchell, and *Emergence and Embodiment: New Essays on Second-Order Cybernetics* (Duke 2009), a volume, co-edited with Bruce Clarke, exploring the continuing relevance of second-order cybernetics in our highly complexified contemporary technoscientific culture. Hansen is currently completing a study of the technicity of time-consciousness that explores the transduction of time and media in relation to the computational and neuroscientific revolutions.