**Mediologies Final**

**Daniel Potes**

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***Becoming an Artist-Theorist***

This paper has caused me all sorts of problems, what started as an attempt to enframe and define a core set of definitions quickly fell apart into an existential journey to find my way. Because of this, I have decided to fall back back on my religious studies background in Eastern religion to guide me. Specifically, I will be using the Eightfold Path as a foundational optics for my thought process in this multipath approach.

Unbeknownst to me upon my application, Media Studies, is NOT the study of an assortment of media in any sort of pragmatic way. From the outset this threw me for a loop, a good kind, and sent me down the first of 8 paths, that of “Right Understanding”. Thankfully it didn’t take me long to have Media Studies defined in a way that I not only understood, but also could expand upon. Minh-Ha Pham helped lay the foundation of this understanding with her definition of Media Studies as the study of the relationship between Media, and “questions of Power”.

To study media, is to study the way in which mass communication affects systems of power. It is ironic then that the example sentence used by the OED for media is ‘their demands were publicized by the media’ (OED, [Site](https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/media)) which right away showcases the power of media to enforce, or help enforce, the carriers of “Authority”. I posit, in agreement with Tara McPherson, that to truly redefine how media is studied, viewed, and utilized, interdisciplinary understandings have to be the basis of our study.

“*In extending our critical methodologies, we must have at least a passing*

*familiarity with code languages, operating systems, algorithmic thinking, and systems design. We need database literacies, algorithmic literacies, computational literacies, interface literacies. We need new hybrid practices: artist theorists; programming humanists; activist scholars; theoretical archivists; critical race coders. We have to shake ourselves out of our small field-based boxes, taking seriously the possibility that our own knowledge practices are "normalized," "modular," and "black boxed" in much the same way as the code we might study in our work. That is, our very scholarly practices tend to undervalue broad contexts, meaningful relation and promiscuous border crossing. While many of us "identify" as interdisciplinary, very few of us extend that border crossing very far (theorists tune out the technical, the technologists are impatient of the abstract, scholars of race mock the computational, seeing it as corrupt).”* (Tara McPherson, *U.S. Operating Systems at Mid-Century*, Race after the Internet pg. 35)

I am convinced that in order to effectively study media (“or mediatic forces” meaning the forces that control or “program” the flow of media), one has to be able to create as well as consume it. With the current explosive growth of social media, every millennial (and their parents) is a content creator, both a consumer, and a producer of media. *“The overall effect of an ever-increasing quantity of images is the radical alienation of consciousness, its isolation and separation, its inability to convincingly, “language” reality and thus its reduction to something on the order of a free-floating hallucination, cut away as it is from all ground.” (Beller, 2006, pg. 15)*

Essential to our case is understanding the current state of media, which the New Media Reader (NMR) rightfully calls “New Media”. According to Lev Manovich, there are many ways this “new” media can be defined, from “digital data controlled by software”, to “the mix between existing cultural conventions and the conventions of software”, to “the aesthetics that accompanies the early stage of every modern media and communication technology” ”(Wardrip-Fruin, 2003, pg. 16); however, I will specifically be using Manovich’s definition of “New Media” as “computer technology used as a distribution platform”, or new media as the method of distributing culture, politics, or other content, through technology-mediated distribution platforms.

Vilem Flusser perfectly describes the evolution of media from “Old” to “New” through the use of the metaphor of the historical shift from “Old Magic to New Magic” (Flusser, 2013). Flusser has this to say about this shift, *“Prehistorical magic is a ritualization of models called ‘myths’ and the current magic, is a ritualization of models called ‘programs’.”* Here, the difference lies only in their methods of transmission. Myths, or “Old Magics” according to Flusser are transmitted orally from a non-human godlike power (revelations) whereas programs are distributed through human authors on computing platforms.

With Media, Media Studies and New Media defined; we can begin our journey down the “Path of Right Thought”. In Buddhism, this second path is the path in which determination and resolve are set, meaning that in our use, this path will guide us in building the framework for thinking about Future Reality technologies.

Before going into detail about these “Future Reality Technologies”, the term should be defined. Future Reality, according to industry professionals, consists of three main technologies. Augmented Reality is a technology that layers virtual Data and visuals over a real object, allowing the user to view information that does not exist in reality through a screened interface. Virtual Reality, built around a headset that changes the vision of the world around the wearer using ocular technology, allows the user to literally view another’s perspective, or a created perspective. Finally, there is Mixed Reality, the newest born of these technological babies, which consists of layering digital data over real scenes while also introducing hologram technology which makes virtual data visible in the real world.

The term Future Reality is a relatively new one, recently introduced through NYC Media Center’s Exploring Future Reality Conference (ExFR). This yearly conference hosts industry professionals from all over the world and from all walks of life and technology. The term Future Reality was utilized in order to avoid locking the audience into the current concept of Virtual, Augmented and Mixed Reality. Current future reality technology, according to the panelists, is still in the process of being born.

Technology experts have an interesting way of thinking about the VR/AR/MR industry, they think about it biologically, recently however, they’ve started talking about it biologically as well. This way of thinking about technology is similar to Donna Harroway’s way of thinking in *A Cyborg Manifesto*. For Harroway, the cyborg is the ultimate mediation between humanity and technology, a merging of the two so total that there is no differentiation, only singularity. “*The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity*.” (NMR, *“A Cyborg Manifesto”,* 2003.) In using this method of thought, we can change our perspective in regards to the technology; it’s inherent biases, and the systems of dominance and “Authority” that allowed this technology to thrive.

By using this biological way of thinking about “new media”, industry professionals are able to describe the hopeful lifecycle of these newly born mediums, and newly born it is. During the panels and workshops of the ExFR Conference this future reality technology (Including Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, and Mixed Reality) was elaborated upon in the context of the onslaught of exponentially rapid changes.

Cybernetics relates directly into this topic of “New” media, in the fact that the use of technology as a mediating tool is what separates the new from the old. In *“Medium is the Message”* (McLuhan, NMR, pg. 204), McLuhan brings up electric light as a medium, one I would argue is a “New” media as well. *“The message of the electric light is like the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive, and decentralized.”* (McLuhan, NMR, pg. 204). This interrelation of terminology, technology, and biology, is only possible because of the collaboration between multi-disciplinary industry professionals.

Inter-disciplinary collaboration has been at the forefront of the creation of these future realities, from the very beginning of mixed reality as early as the 19th century, where panoramic painting was utilized by artists to showcase beautiful and inaccessible locations (though there are perspectival reliefs that can be found as early as 600 ce, where the Persian conquest of Israel and neighboring lands was showcased on a perspectival relief in the halls of the Persian Shah). Without the combination of artists versed in perspective, and craftsmen able to construct perspective systems into the designs, many of the most famous perspectival pieces could not have been created.

Not only is collaboration essential to the creation of perspectival systems, it is also critical to the understanding of the specific perspective shown. Nicole Fleetwood in “Troubling Vision” makes it perfectly clear why understanding unique perspectives is so important. Fleetwood uses a personal story from her childhood, and shows from the perspective of her grandmother, the power of the White gaze (A gaze rooted in systemic oppression and racism). *“How could the look and reserved hello of a little white girl reduce my grandmother who was the strongest person I knew to understanding herself as being fat, black, and ugly?” (*Fleetwood, 2011, Preface*)*

Our use of the terms Gaze, Perspective, and Perspectival systems hearkens back to our framework of the Eightfold Path, specifically the third path of “Right Speech”. Allen Feldman, in his paper *“the Actuarial Gaze”* helps set the stage for our interpretation of a “Gaze”. For Feldman, the Actuarial Gaze is when “*The arresting power of optical technology to stabilize image flows, to freeze temporalities of urban and global circulation, is conjoined with legal and militarized powers of arrest and apprehension*”. Feldman’s Actuarial Gaze deals with different, but related issues to bell hooks’s oppositional gaze.

*“The actuarial gaze is concerned with the powers of arrest in its fullest perceptual and criminalizing gauge. At sites like Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, in the local policing of economic, racial and class margins, and in the medical and economic management of compromised immune systems, the actuarial-forensic gaze renders risk perception haptic, tactile, penetrative, and transformative.***”**(Allen Feldman, On the Actuarial Gaze, pg 7, 2005.)

The Oppositional Gaze, in contrast, is a naturally occurring perspective wrought by an inherently broken evolutionary system of media. This system has made invisible the perspectives of person’s of color (especially women of color) in order to better maintain the sanctity of whiteness. bell hooks breaks that mold, and with “The Oppositional Gaze”, makes visible, what was once a systemically hidden, “female spectatorship”.

“*Talking with black female spectators, looking at written discussions either in*

*fiction or academic essays about black women, I noted the connection made*

*between the realm of representation in mass media and the capacity of black*

*women to construct ourselves as subjects in daily life. The extent to which black*

*women feel devalued, objectified, dehumanized in this society determines the scope*

*and texture of their looking relations.” (*hooks, bell, *The Oppositional Gaze,* pg.127,

2010.)

In her paper “*U.S. Operating Systems at Mid-Century”* Tara McPherson discusses the structural systems of race, electronic culture, and post structuralism as it relates to systems of oppression. This leads us into the fourth of the Eightfold path, that of “Right Conduct” (Also the last of the paths that we will be using for this paper). For our purpose, the path of “Right Conduct” will be used to frame the positive ways that *“artist theorists; programming humanists; activist scholars; theoretical archivists” and “critical race coders”* can work together to create collaborative systems of remediative technology.

“*We might bring these two arguments together, triangulating race, electronic culture, and post structuralism, and, further, argue that race, particularly in the United States, is central to this undertaking, fundamentally shaping how we see and know as well as the technologies that underwrite or cement both vision and knowledge. Certain modes of racial visibility and knowing coincide or dovetail with specific ways of organizing data: if digital computing underwrites today’s information economy and is the central technology of post-world War II America, these technologized ways of seeing/knowing took shape in a world also struggling with shifting knowledge about and representations of race.*” (Tara McPherson, U.S. Operating Systems at Mid-Century, Race after the Internet pg 24)

“New media” is inherently remediative, *“New media as material re-articulation, or encoding, of purely cultural tendencies – In short, as ideas rather than technologies.”* (Manovich, NMR, 2003, pg. 16). To be remediative, not only does this new media have to provide a solution to a problem, using the original definition of the word, but it also has to re-articulate past media in current forms. Technological remediation follows the “path of right conduct” in that it provides a tool that artists, theorists, and artist-theorists can use to directly combat systems of global oppression.

“*Might we ask if there is not something particular to the very forms of electronic culture that seems to encourage just such a movement, a movement that partitions race off from the specificity of media forms? Put differently, might we argue that the very structures of digital computation develop at least in part to cordon off race and to contain it?”* (Tara McPherson, U.S. Operating Systems at Mid-Century, Race after the Internet pg. 24)

One of the greatest challenges facing this “Future Reality” technology is to ensure that those creating the content understand the responsibility, and the foundational biases built into global computational systems. In the article “*Immediacy, Hypermediacy and Remediation*“, Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin discuss some of the challenges facing the future of these technologies.

**“***Meredith Bricken, an interface designer, writes that in a virtual environment, ‘You can be the mad hatter or you can be the teapot; you can move back and forth to the rhythm of a song. You can be a tiny droplet in the rain or in the river’ All of these enthusuasts promise us transparent, perceptual immediacy, experience without mediation, for they expect virtual reality to diminish and ultimately to deny the mediating presence of the computer and it’s interface. Bricken’s work is, in fact, entitled ‘Virtual Worlds: No Interface to Design’***”** (Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin Immediacy, Hypermediacy, and Remediation pg 22)

There might not be an interface to design, but the framework, the structure, of the systems that must be built and used to replace existing ones, has to be defined. Without artist-theorists to help bridge the gap of vastly different disciplines, the systems that remain in place today, will be impossible to deconstruct. Like the Philosopher-Kings of old, interdisciplinary envoys must lay the foundations for this newly born technology, a technology so new it could be said to still be gestating.

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