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Intermediality and Interventions: Applying Intermediality Frameworks to Reality Television and Microblogs — Rosemary Overell

 August 6, 2014

Abstract: *This article explores the usefulness of 'intermediality' approaches for understanding contemporary reality television. Through a case study of Intervention, it is proposed that intermedial frameworks illuminate reality television's function as a "dream of presence". The article focuses particularly on intermedial manifestations of the television program on the microblogging platform, tumblr. Building on studies of intermediality within cinema and visual cultural studies, this article highlights the liminal, affective and processual elements that arise from the intermedial movement of content. It does this through an application of ideas from non-representational theory as a means for expanding intermediality beyond the cinematic. This article suggests that liminality, affect and process are, in turn, presented in Intervention, and emphasised in the intermedial presentation of Intervention 'screencaps' on fan-made tumblr microblogs.*

Introduction

This article is an intervention into contemporary accounts of intermediality. Building on recent work in



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Figure 1. An example of the black and white titles used in *Intervention* to elaborate on the addict's back story (ordinary intervention, 2012 -). The episode from which this is screencapped is "Tammi and Daniel" (A&E Network 2006b).

cinema and visual culture studies (Barker 2009; Bennett 2007; Pethó 2010; Pethó 2011; Rajewsky 2005), I propose that intermediality functions as a useful framework for understanding how contemporary popular cultural production works as what Derrida calls the "dream of presence" (1978) – a representational manifestation of a striving for significance and meaning in response to more than representational experiences. Here, I integrate work in non-representational theory (NRT) to elaborate on the more than representational potential of intermedial products.

Intermediality's concern with the between-ness of media signifiers highlights the liminal, affective and processual aspects that arise via the movement of content between media forms. These, in turn, destabilise the apparent coherence and 'purity' of mediated representation and the presumption of media specific modes of spectatorship. This complements NRT approaches, which argue for a privileging of the more than representational dimensions of the cultural landscape. In particular, Mitch Rose's (2006) elaboration on Derrida's "dreams of presence" as an inclination and striving – but necessarily also failing – towards an ossified, accountable understanding of culture enlivens intermedial approaches. In this article, I apply the framework of intermediality to the reality television programme *Intervention* (A&E Network 1999 – 2013) and its surrounding fan blogs.

Intermediality

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Intermediality rejects media specificity. It moves away from understanding media as discrete technologies of representation and, in particular, rejects assumptions that particular types of representation are bound to particular types of media (for example moving images with cinema). Furthermore, it differs from transmedia frameworks, which focus on how textual content and significance change when moved from one media form to another. While transmedia approaches acknowledge the mobility of media content, they still present media forms as discrete signifying systems, which produce coherent meaning – either across or within formats. Intermediality troubles this assumption by focusing on how media products come into being via the dynamic inter-relation between media. That is, intermediality is characterised by medial transposition. The process of the transposition of media content, and of one medium into another, also points to the instability of signification. Ágnes Pethő (2011) posits intermediality as constitutive of new mediated experiences in between media forms where media – and their associated significations – are radically dislocated and displaced. This is partly because, via this movement, traces of the originary medial form and content are incorporated into the new medial form and content. Pethő notes the possibilities constituted via intermedial relations and the potential of an intermedial perspective to highlight the multiple mediated relations that produce our comprehension of media content.

Pethő emphasises the affective elements integral to intermediality through her rejection of Kristevan intertextuality.[1] According to Pethő, intermediality is more than textual. It is also more than representational. It is about the myriad of experiences, which are beyond articulation and cognition via standard signifying frameworks such as language: “Intermediality ... is not something one ‘deciphers’, it is something one perceives or senses” (2011, 68). Pethő thereby emphasizes the sensuous aspects of embodied spectatorship of cinematic products. She argues for a phenomenological approach to intermediality as a means of accounting for the pre-cognitive experience of cinema. Her understanding, then, is that the experience of intermediality is affective. Here, affect is defined in Massumian (1992; 2002; [1987] 2007) terms as a “prepersonal intensity” ([1987] 2007, xvi) beyond

representational frameworks and descriptors such as emotions. The instability of a coherent cinematic mediality is highlighted precisely through intermediality's concern with the liminal spaces constituted in the moments when media content and representations move between media. This, again, echoes Massumi who argues that affect can only occur in terms of process, passage and interaction *between* subjects, things and spaces.[2] Massumi posits process as primary to "every formation" (1992, 194) and notes that processuality works as "sites of passage that gather up movement and send it back translated" (ibid.). As Rossiter (2003) points out in his work on processual media theory, this movement between media formations is important, partly because such a dynamic changes the media's form, content and reception, but also because, by understanding contemporary media as processual, space is made for understanding media as socially, and culturally contingent.

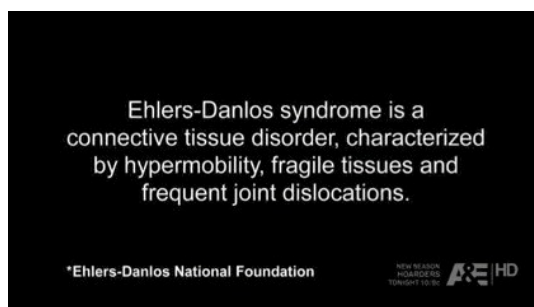


Figure 2. An example of the black and white titles used in *Intervention* to present 'facts' about addiction and health problems (ordinary intervention, 2012 -). The episode from which this is screencapped is "Linda" (A&E Network 2009a).

Intermediality as a "dream of presence"

I propose that we can understand intermediality in terms of non-representational theory (NRT) – a conceptual framework associated with cultural geography. NRT's remit is to "enliven" the humanities through a privileging of affective experiences over representational – particularly textual – analyses (Thrift 2008; Anderson and Harrison 2010).

A key site for NRT analyses is "cultural landscapes" (Rose 2002; 2006). Rose broadens the geographical implications of "landscape" to include theoretical

engagements with cultural practices and objects that attempt to “capture” such manifestations “into sense ... into something that can be ... imagined in a mental tableau” (2006, 537). Rose argues that the representational concerns of much cultural analysis ossify the vitality of cultural processes. Instead, he presents an NRT approach to culture as one that collapses subject and object into co-emergent becomings (538). In this way his approach is resonant with Pethő’s emphasis on intermediality as constituted through phenomenological correlations of the types of embodiment implied by different media forms.

Rose’s (2006) approach to cultural landscape further complements intermedial approaches through his understanding of cultural analysis as a ‘dream of presence’ instead of a ‘thingified’ culture. Rose claims that we are drawn to stable understandings of culture that mitigate the messy experience of engaging with the world. Rose dubs these inclinations – both in their manifestations as coherent, signifying systems and the process of striving towards these coherencies – dreams of presence. Here, he draws on Derrida (1978), who describes the “dream” of the “philosophical man” [sic] for “full presence, the reassuring foundation” (292). In Derridean terms, this is an impossible possibility because of the instability of language systems.

Nonetheless, as Rose posits, we are inclined to the certitude of teleologies, grand narratives and coherent signification. Rose provocatively suggests that cultural theory is itself a manifestation of this dream. Like other NRT theorists, Rose calls for the humanities to account for the “more than representational” (2006, 345). One means for doing this is a foregrounding of the process of these inclinations towards the “performance of closure and encirclement” (2006, 345) that goes with cultural analysis, but also permeates our everyday encounters with cultural products and processes. Despite the impossibility of stabilizing culture into a coherent landscape, we repeat this performance as a way of being in the world which Rose dubs “affective cabling that connects self and word” (ibid.). The privileging of the strivings towards meaning undercut claims to representational meaning.[3]

In terms of intermediality, Rajewsky gestures towards a

similarly impossible—though desired state, arguing that the apparent material specificity of ordinary media is illusory. That is, intermedial products foreground the surface claims of media as inscribing a discrete materiality within their modes of representation. She notes that this foregrounding produces a particular ‘as if’ experience for the intermedial consumer: “the book reads as if it is a film”.[4] Here, we see the inclination towards coherent significations. Medial approaches are a “dream of presence” and intermedial approaches operate similarly to Rose’s work – in destabilizing the assumption of medial solidity. Pethó echoes a similar idea in her discussion of the viewer’s embodied response to cinema – the desire and striving to stabilise and decipher the intermedial experience. The work of the spectator in fostering what Rose dubs a “dream of presence” in fact draws attention to the intermediality of cinematic experience and the impossibility of a coherently signifying, cinematic product.

To summarise, intermediality is characterised by liminality, affect and processuality. These three characteristics highlight the signifiatory instability of media content, as well as the power of media themselves and of intermedial experiences to push beyond the representational systems that characterize discrete, medial, approaches. In turn, I propose that intermedial approaches are enriched through recourse to NRT frameworks that privilege the in-betweenness within all “dreams of presence”.

Case



Figure 3. An example of how the production mechanisms of the program are shown on *Intervention* (ordinary intervention, 2012 –). The episode from which this is screencapped is “Linda” (A&E Network 2009a).

study: *Intervention*

Intervention was a reality television program that aired on the American cable channel A&E Network (A&E) between 2005 and 2013. The show was demonstrative of A&E's shift from "Arts and Entertainment" programming – made up of imported British dramas and documentaries on opera, theatre and cinema – to a focus on reality television.[5] The premise of *Intervention* is the representation of an addicted subject, who undergoes a "Johnson Institute" – so called "ambush" – intervention for their addiction and is encouraged to go into rehabilitation.[6] The addict is contextualised through to-camera commentary from the addict and their family and friends. The intervention is overseen by a professional interventionist, and the program usually closes with a "catch up" clip, generally of the recovering addict in a rehabilitation clinic.

Intervention is formulaic. Certain formal elements are consistent across ten of the thirteen seasons. The stylistic changes in the final seasons were minimal, indicating that the show had found its formula. Common elements included the theme song, advertising break bookends which incorporated sirens over a blurred, fast moving image of flashing lights, the closing theme of The Davenports' song about recovery "5 steps" (2000), the use of black-background-white-text inter-titles to inform viewers of personal information on the addict subject and 'facts' about addiction (Figures 1 and 2), the narrative of introducing the addict and showing their substance use and relaying the addict's (often traumatic) personal history, the intervention, and then finally rehabilitation. Two of the interventionists appeared in all thirteen seasons, Jeff Van Vonderen and Candy Finnigan. Both Van Vonderen and Finnigan are themselves former addicts. Like other A&E reality programs, and reality television broadly, *Intervention* used a documentary aesthetic. Camera work, particularly in the initial section of each episode, where the addict is tracked in their everyday life, was handheld. The production staff was regularly revealed – particularly when interventions did not go to plan – talking to the addict and their family from either behind or in front of the camera. Camera operators and production equipment were often shown in mirrors or by second cameras (Figure 3). In the final few seasons, the intervention "scene" began with an overhead establishing shot that revealed the family and

interventionist as well as the production staff, lights and cameras. This *cinema vérité* style was crucial to building the program's generic classification as reality television,[7] and claim to an authentic 'documentary' portrayal of substance use. This aesthetic also positioned it apart from slicker programs with similar themes, such as *Celebrity Rehab with Dr. Drew* (VH1 2008 – 2012) and *Addicted* (TLC 2010). The hand-held aesthetic of *Intervention* only lifts in the final scenes at rehab – where steady shots of doctors, counselors and the recovering addict are used.

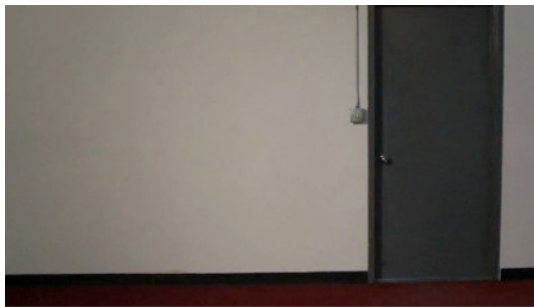


Figure 4. One of the liminal spaces common to *Intervention*, a hallway (ordinary intervention, 2012 –). The episode from which this is screencapped is “Tammi and Daniel” (A&E Network 2006b).

Intervention is transmediated in numerous ways. Its content has crossed primarily from television to Internet platforms. Two popular memes have been created by viewers from the television episodes. The first shows a clip of inhalant addict Allison (A&E Network 2008) “huffing” computer duster and mumbling “I’m walking on sunshine” mashed up with the K. C. and the Sunshine Band song “Walking on Sunshine”.[8] The disconnect between Allison’s obvious desperation and the song’s upbeat lyric serves as the “punch line” for the meme. The second *Intervention* meme shows Rocky (A&E Network 2010e), a cocaine addict, emitting a high-pitched cry during his intervention. The meme became a viral video dubbed “The Best Cry Ever” and was remixed into clips of people expressing disappointment at ostensibly trivial matters.[9] These memes appropriate content from *Intervention* and re-signify it through incorporating it with apparently unrelated content from popular culture. There are also numerous other viewer-made YouTube mash ups of *Intervention*, including facebook fan pages and discussion boards focused on the program. Like

many other reality television programs, *Intervention* has prompted various tumblr pages where users can share, like and upload primarily visual and video material. tumblr has a handful of blogs focused on *Intervention* where users screencap (still frame) and gif (moving frame) particular moments from the show and sometimes provide commentary on the program.

A number of academic articles have discussed *Intervention*. None, however, have looked at the intermediality of the program, nor its transmedia engagement by audiences. Instead, work on *Intervention* has critiqued the ethics and efficacy of the program from a health-science perspective (Kosovski and Smith 2011); the commodification of drug addiction and *Intervention*'s position within the wider genre of transformation reality television (Oriekose 2013); and the over-representation of white addicts as 'wasted' white citizens on the program (Daniels 2012).[10]

Intervention and intermediality

I propose that intermediality is a useful method for understanding *Intervention*, particularly "tumbld" interventions which emphasise liminality, processuality and affect. I argue that the intermedial characteristics of tumbld *Intervention* demonstrate the "dreams of presence" that Rose discusses via Derrida.



Figure 5. One of the liminal spaces common to *Intervention*, a streetscape (ordinary intervention, 2012 -). The episode from which this is screencapped is "Trent" (A&E Network 2007).

Intervention, the television program, focuses on liminal spaces, experiences and subjects. These representations of in-betweeness gesture towards televisual media's desire to overcome liminality in favor of neat teleology.

However, the repetition and foregrounding of such spaces simultaneously highlight the inability of media to cordon off experience into coherent, self-contained narrative forms. The settings for all but the final section of *Intervention* (in rehab) are usually interim sites. We encounter squats, cheap hotel rooms, brothels, conurban housing estates, fast food outlets and, most of all, streetscapes (Figures 4 – 6). The chief ‘interim’ space common to every episode is the hotel conference room where the intervention occurs. The “beige blandness” (Daniels, 110) of the conference room signals liminality in a most banal way. It is striking how similar these rooms are despite being scattered across North America (Figures 8 – 10). This sameness indicates the purpose of such rooms – as inoffensive sites through which hundreds of professionals move every year. Further, the conference room works as a waiting room for each episode’s ‘cast’. Prior to the intervention, we see the family and friends waiting for the addict and anticipating the confrontation. During the intervention, the interventionist, family and friends wait to see if the addict will move on from the liminal site of the conference room to rehab. The repeated trope in the later seasons of zooming out to show the mechanics of the show’s production prior to the intervention further highlight the temporary function of the conference room. The wide shot gives an impression of urgent assembly of production equipment which will then be hastily dismantled so that the room can be used again by conference delegates.



Figure 6. One of the liminal spaces common to *Intervention*, an image of a fast-food restaurant sign, presumably taken from a car (ordinary intervention, 2012 –). The episode from which this is screencapped

is “Salina and Troy” (A&E Network 2006a).

Furthermore, the overarching discourse of *Intervention* is that of “moving on” from one’s addiction. As Daniels discusses, *Intervention*’s narrative hinges on the transformation of the addict from the negatively framed substance (ab)user to a healthy citizen-subject.[11] This discourse requires a focus on the addict’s life as a series of transitional experiences. The instability of addiction is emphasised in each episode’s opening scenes where we see addicts scrounging for money, usually via illicit activities, and the apparently infinite risks of scoring and then consuming their substance. As with the waiting space of the hotel conference room, these scenes position the addict’s experience as liminal. The addict is almost always on the move – their experiences are framed as transient. This is most evident in the repeated trope of the addict resisting the format of the show itself. Usually this manifests in the addict storming out of a to-camera scene, removing their microphone and running away into the street. The addicts – by warrant of their addiction – occupy a marginal subjectivity. This is compounded by the regularity of the inclusion of addicts who signify marginality within dominant discourse. *Intervention*, though white-dominated, as Daniels observes, offers a parade of working-class people, abuse victims, prostitutes, non-heterosexual subjects and the mentally ill. The addicts also embody an interim subjectivity – relentlessly striving for, and dreaming of, a stable, present self via the use of drugs or alcohol, while simultaneously demonstrating the impossibility of this position through a heightened instability in the form of chasing their substance and waiting for a connect.



Figure 7. The hotel room, the site of the intervention, is ubiquitous and similar across episodes of *Intervention*

(ordinary intervention, 2012 -). The episode from which this is screencapped is "Trent" (A&E Network 2007).

The liminality of *Intervention* – and by implication the televisual medium – is highlighted when screencaps and gif images of the program are presented on tumblr. "Ordinary Interventions" (ordinary intervention, 2012 -) tumbles screencaps from *Intervention* without narrative linearity. Tumblr is a microblogging platform, launched in 2007, which is mostly used to post images. Users can 'follow' others' blog posts and access them through a generic 'dashboard' which displays blog posts chronologically. That is, all the posts from bloggers one follows are collated onto the dashboard. Tumblr also follows an "infinite scroll" format. The screen refreshes with more posts each time the user appears to reach the end of a feed. Provided the user follows a number of bloggers, the dashboard is constantly offering new images, which may have little to do with the other images displayed.

If one follows a cute puppy blog and a feminist comic blog, for example, seemingly unrelated images from both will appear sequentially – as the blogger posts – producing a discordant series of images. Users can also personalize their individual blog interface through the application of 'themes' which determine font, layout etc. With "Ordinary Interventions", images are displayed two across and rarely are images from the same episode placed alongside each other. The screencaps are of varying sizes, determined by the format of the video file from which the image was taken. They are hashtagged with the name of the addict, addiction as well as #intervention and #aetv. However, and unlike most tumblr interfaces, the hashtags are not readily viewable to browsers, though they can be searched on the blog's search function or by clicking the '+' button, though this is not readily apparent. Importantly, "Ordinary Interventions" does not include images of drugs, alcohol or substance use. That is, the blogger focuses on the ordinary, liminal moments of the addict's everyday life – the interim moments between the spectacularised (through the television program in extreme close ups and repetition) instances of substance use. "Ordinary Interventions" provides no information about the blog's

author, no text or re-blogged images.



Figure 8. The hotel room, the site of the intervention, is ubiquitous and similar across episodes of *Intervention* (ordinary intervention, 2012 -). The episode from which this is screencapped is "Tammi and Daniel" (A&E Network 2006a).

The apparently random collation of screencaps on "Ordinary Interventions" produces liminality through its un-anchoring of 'moments' from *Intervention* in a non-linear format. The 'capping' of people: crying and laughing, ordinary household scenes, urban landscapes, old photographs, direct-to-cameras against a blue background and the banality of the hotel conference rooms, lack narrative coherence. This is not a "remix" like the Allison and Rocky memes where elements from *Intervention* are incorporated into a new narrative for comic effect. Instead, "Ordinary Interventions" presentation of *Intervention* appears meaningless. In fact, tumblr users without familiarity with the program would most likely find 'Ordinary Interventions' impenetrable. The very act of tumbling indiscriminate screencaps from *Intervention* radically dislocates the transformational, solidifying narrative of the program as televisual media. There is no rehabilitation or resolution, simply an endless scroll through interim moments. Instead, *Intervention* mobilises affect as crucial to the flow of each episode. The representation of affective responses to addiction, both from the addict and their loved ones, generates sympathy in viewers and a desire for the protagonist to "move beyond" the liminality of addiction to the apparent solidity of rehabilitation. Recall Massumi's and NRT theorists' understanding of affect as more than articulated, representable and cognized emotion. Instead

it refers to the intensities one experiences through the movement from “one ... state ... to another” (Massumi 2007, xvi), hence the program’s liminality. Thus, while the affect gestured towards in the program may provoke an emotional response in viewers, affect is not synonymous with emotion. However, the subject’s containment of affect within language – through the 12-step process of ‘admitting’ a problem and containing affective responses within a pathologised discourse of “emotional trauma” – gestures yet again towards the inclination to pin down the instability of everyday life experiences.



Figure 9. The hotel room, the site of the intervention, is ubiquitous and similar across episodes of *Intervention* (ordinary intervention, 2012 –). The episode from which this is screencapped is “Nichole” (A&E Network 2012).

Affect is most evident in the liminal moments of the program. In fact, Rocky’s “Best Cry Ever” clearly demonstrates the more-than-ness of the experience of addiction and, accordingly, how affect is mobilized in *Intervention*. His cry is wordless, high-pitched and completely embodied. He shudders as he emits it from deep in his body. This moment, of what Dolar (2007) might call “voice” demonstrates the inadequacy of language for representing embodied experience.[12] Further, Rocky’s cry demonstrates affect’s own liminality. The moment occurs in the interim space of the intervention in a hotel conference room. Moreover, as Dolar writes, screams demonstrate the pre-cognitive “penultimate stage” (69) prior to the subject’s interpellation within representational structures.[13] Alongside affective moments, such as Rocky’s scream during the intervention, the program dwells on addicts’ repeated insistence that they are “without words” and that their subjectivity – bound to their addiction – is beyond representation. For example, addicts say: “wow I

can't even talk right now" (A&E Network 2010d), "it's like having an orgasm; you can't just describe it" (A&E Network 2010e), and "it's kind of hard ... that feeling you get" (A&E Network 2011).



Figure 10. The hotel room, the site of the intervention, is ubiquitous and similar across episodes of *Intervention* (ordinary intervention, 2012 -). The episode from which this is screencapped is "Greg" (A&E Network 2009b).

The intermedial presentation of *Intervention's* representations of affective intensity on tumblr generates an affective response from tumblr users. Such responses can be understood as yet another variation of the "dream of presence". The affective engagement with the program – generated through tumbling and commenting – foregrounds the impossibility of understanding either the program content, or the medium, as singular, discrete and, most importantly, representational.

"Fuck Yes Intervention" (Fuck Yes Intervention, 2011 -) is a tumblr, which presents screencaps alongside gifs from *Intervention*. Unlike "Ordinary Interventions", the interface offers clear hashtags and information about the blogger, who is a drug addict.[14] "Fuck Yes Intervention" also encourages interaction from tumblr users. Followers of the blog can comment, ask the blogger questions and request that particular episodes be screencapped or giffed. "Fuck Yes Intervention" presents affective moments from the program that then generates discussion of viewers' affective responses to *Intervention*. For example, responding to a screencap of crystal-meth addict, Cristy (A&E Network 2006c), radhabits writes: "i cried the first time i watched this episode, and every time I watch intervention" [sic] (Fuck Yes Intervention, 2011a). Another Cristy post (Fuck Yes Intervention, 2011b) – this time showing Cristy's experience of being high as she

dances around her bedroom – prompted unintelligible responses from other users, unable to represent linguistically “what they just watched”:

dynomitemedley: uhhhhhh

luxuryintherough: what. the. fuck. did. i. just. watch???? luxuryintherough

zombiecupcake: I DON'T KNOW (ibid.).

Rather than the apparently straightforward governmental meaning of *Intervention* as a lesson in how not to be a good, healthy, citizen, the users of “Fuck Yes Intervention” present multiple, affective responses to the screencaps and gifs on the blog.

“Ordinary Interventions” also focuses on affective moments from *Intervention*. There are numerous images of addicts, family-members and friends in the liminal space of embodied intensity. Furthermore, the tumblr’s screencaps of the inter-titles and subtitles common to every episode undercut the apparent authority and hegemony of textuality not only in the program, but more broadly, in representational understandings of reality television. *Intervention* uses inter-titles to elaborate on the addict’s back-story as well as to present facts about addiction. Subtitles are used when the speech onscreen is inaudible. The haphazard insertion of text-based screencaps beside images of *Intervention*’s overwrought subjects produces a dislocation of language and image, which draws attention to the inadequacy of representational structures for expressing embodied experience. More importantly, the blog’s *bricolage* of images and text foregrounds the illusory claim of reality television forms to signifying authority. The affect – isolated in the screencaps of “Ordinary Intervention” – overwhelms pretensions to representational solidity. Writing on captioned visual art, Bennett indicates that rather than the printed words operating as a Barthesian anchor for the image they “run relentlessly unable to flow through the normal communication channels ... register[ing] as pure intensity: affect characterised by ... lack of attachment, disarticulated from motives” (442). “Ordinary Interventions” enacts this affective disarticulation in sequences, which themselves are sense-less. For example, an image of a woman laughing to camera is followed by an inter-title stating: “Coley has

been collecting burl for the past three months. He has never sold any" (Figure 10). Next is a screencap of a woman petting a puppy on a mattress, then a middle-aged woman sitting in front of giant rosary beads, and so on. As Pethő points out in relation to cinema, the potential of intermediality to break up and dislocate signifying systems through a foregrounding of the disjunction between speech and image not only rejects a fixity of meaning for the content represented, but also the media form 'doing' the representing (61).



Figure 11. "Ordinary Interventions" offers a bricolage of disarticulated screencaps from *Intervention* (ordinary intervention, 2012 -).

presentation of the processual nature of addiction in *Intervention* resonates with intermedial understandings of media forms as mutable, changing and striving towards coherence, though never reaching it. The premise of the program, as discussed above, is a transformative 'journey' from addiction to rehabilitation. Using pop-psychological platitudes common to therapy culture, interventionists Finnigan and Van Vonderen encourage the addicts' families to "process" the intervention and "work through" their own neuroses (often via a the "Betty Ford Family Program") as a means of overcoming the co-dependency of their relationship with the addict. For example, in season 8, Van Vonderen tells the family before the intervention: "recovery is not a sudden landing. It's a long journey" (A&E Network 2010a). In a later episode, Finnigan tells crack addict Vinnie's family that addiction is "a progressive, terminal disease ... nothing changes, if nothing changes" (A&E Network 2010b).

Despite its emphasis on process, *Intervention* rarely offers a straightforward transformation of either the addict or their loved ones. By frustrating deterministic narratives of self-improvement the show highlights both

the desire for wholeness and progress, as well as its futility. This is clearly demonstrated in the closing inter-titles which regularly inform viewers that the addict “left treatment” before the proscribed ninety days, has “relapsed”, or simply refused to continue treatment and be “rehabilitated”. Over thirteen seasons, viewers, addicts and their families and friends repeat a desire for wholeness and wellbeing, which can never be achieved. The viewer who tunes in weekly finds pleasure in both the desire for narrative neatness, coupled with knowledge of the trajectory’s likely failure.

It is in its intermedial form on tumblr, presentations of *Intervention* demonstrate the processuality of intermedial transposition. We can understand the screencaps of “Ordinary Interventions” as foregrounding process, but like the content of the program itself, repeatedly failing. “Ordinary Interventions” presents a radical asynchronicity in its infinitely scrolling, random presentation of *Intervention* screencaps. It repeatedly interpellates users to “make sense” of the images while always undermining this through the random order in which the images appear. “Ordinary Intervention” does use tags, which could ostensibly sort the images. However, these tags are haphazard. Addicts have multiple addictions or their name or addiction is incorrectly tagged, and images of non-addict family members will often also be tagged with the substance name. Users remain stymied in their search for narrative clarity. This failure of comprehension highlights the processual nature of cognition and foregrounds our initial affective responses as unable to “fit” the signifying structures assumed by media forms.

The processual reconfiguration of *Intervention* via “Ordinary Interventions” is also reflexive. The blog draws attention to how affect is produced within the medium of television via its re-presentation on tumblr. It is therefore intermedial in the sense that it is concerned with the emergence of both *Intervention* the program and reality television more broadly. Rather than being presented with a one-way – or even dialogic – communication from media to consumer, “Ordinary Interventions” in the asynchronicity of its mediality is a porous “dream of presence”.[15] As “Ordinary Interventions” lacks clear narrative conventions, it fails to communicate a coherent

explication of addiction. Instead, its interface generates a repeated experience of striving for and inclining towards present-ness. Even more than the repeated failures depicted in its televisual form, the transposition of *Intervention* through “Ordinary Interventions” will never offer resolution. When the medium migrates it is “reconfigured” (Bennett, 448) by its presentation in a new medium’s interface. The screencaps of addicts, their loved ones and the interventionists – for lack of a dialogic reverse-shot – seep into one another to potentially produce multiple, contradictory, affective responses which make any clear articulation in language difficult. The apparently random sequences of images resist the sequential reading to which televisual content lays claim.

Conclusion

In closing, I wish to briefly describe one of the most recent screencaps posted on “Ordinary Interventions” (Figure 11). It shows a black screen with a white blur. The blogger has clearly screencapped the interim moment between the affective enaction of the addict’s ‘process’ to intervention and the insertion of an explanatory title card. The hashtags are general (#substanceabuse; #addiction #intervention etc.) – they do not indicate the episode. The one unique, though perhaps predictably inadequate, hashtag is #blackscreen. The screencaps around it show a tattooed woman in profile, a hand reaching for an *hors d’oeuvre*, and a close up of a woman crying. This image: #blackscreen, perhaps best embodies the intermediality of *Intervention* as transposed through tumblr. It is a representation of liminality, a captured microsecond in-between narration. Its position in relation to the affect-steeped screencaps around it foregrounds affect and refuses clear signification. Its lack of communication, despite gesturing towards textuality (it is obviously a fade from text to black), demonstrates processuality.

Ordinary Interventi



This

Figure 12. Recent posts on “Ordinary Interventions”
(ordinary intervention, 2012 –).

discussion of intermediality in relation to reality television and microblogging demonstrates the usefulness of intermedial frameworks for analysing and destabilizing popular cultural texts and media. Further, I want to suggest that the application of intermedial theory to *Intervention*'s televisual and tumbld manifestations could fruitfully be expanded through reference to NRT understandings of Derridean “dreams of presence”.

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Notes

[1] Rajewsky also discusses the difference between Kristeva's framework of intertextuality and intermediality (Rajewsky 2005, 48). See also, Julia Kristeva (1986).

[2] Other scholars have looked at the potential for an affective becoming through the application of an intermedial methodology to understanding cinematic texts. Barker, for example, suggests that the interaction between viewer and film is one of emergence, rather than consumption. Bennett deviates from studies of cinematic intermediality in her work on visual arts that incorporate or gesture towards the moving image. However, she is also emphatic that intermediality is processual, liminal and more-than representational.

[3] See also, Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (2011). Berlant argues that it is the desire and striving for an end, which we know will always already fail, which is seductive.

[4] Pethő also discusses this: "we can always tell for example when a piece of prose writing or poetry in literature is unfolding like 'moving images', we recognize the characteristics of cinematic 'framing' or 'montage' whenever it is reflected in any other medium" (2010, 66).

[5] Examples of recent and current reality programs on A&E include *Hoarders*, *Duck Dynasty*, *Rodeo Girls* and *Storage Wars* (A&E Network 2013a).

[6] Says the website's copy: "Each episode follows addicts through their daily life and the devastation their dependency has brought to their family and friends. Upon reaching the brink, their loved ones stage a surprise intervention conducted by one of four specialists" (A&E Network 2013b).

[7] The 'recovered' status of Van Vonderen and Finnigan also built the program's claim to authenticity. Both interventionists regularly mentioned their own "struggles with addiction" in episodes and the profiles of Van Vonderen and Finnigan on *Intervention's* website foreground this aspect of their history (A&E Network 2013c).

[8] A summary of the variations on the Allison meme are available on Know Your Meme (Don 2013). The "Walking on Sunshine" motif gained further status when it was

included in an episode of *South Park* (Comedy Central 2010).

[9] A summary of the variations on the Rocky meme are available on Know Your Meme (Steez 2010).

[10] Daniels argues that white addicts in *Intervention* are moralized. Firstly – as addicted – they are framed as ‘failures’ in terms of their performance of normative whiteness. If the addict accepts the offer of rehabilitation, however, they are positioned as redeemed and “deserving” (2012, 114).

[11] This is also reflected in the lyrics to the program’s closing theme song. The lyrics include: “No reprimand / Deliberate, demand / With your two feet at hand / Get back / This train’s a comin’ down the track / Five steps you’re over” (The Davenports 2000). These lyrics presumably gesture towards the “Five Major Steps to Intervention”.

[12] Rocky’s cry is also reproduced in *The Hangover 3* where the emphasis lies on the affective aurality of his cry (Phillips 2013).

[13] Here, and throughout the book, Dolar draws on Lacanian psychoanalysis.

[14] The blogger writes: “i don’t know if i have ever mentioned this on here but i am also an addict” [sic] (Fuck Yes Intervention 2013).

[15] See Bennett: intermedial gesture is a “tension ... that it expresses ... the experience of ‘being in’ an interaction – rather than ... articulated communication” (2007, 441).

Bio

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