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Risk Media and the End of Anonymity

Abstract

Whereas threats from twentieth century 'broadcast era' media were characterised in terms of ideology and 'effects', today the greatest risks posed by media are informational. This paper argues that digital participation as the condition for the maintenance of today's self identity and basic sociality has shaped a new principal media risk of the loss of anonymity. I identify three interrelated key features of this new risk. Firstly, basic communicational acts are archival. Secondly, there is a diminishment of the predictable 'decay time' of media. And, thirdly, both of these shape a new individual and organizational vulnerability of 'emergence' – the haunting by our digital trails.

This article places these media risks in the context of the shifting nature and function of memory and the potential uses and abuses of digital pasts.

Keywords

Media, anonymity, risk, decay time, emergence, memory

1. Introduction

Whereas once media audiences had collective anonymity in their consumption in the golden age of broadcast that defined the twentieth century, in today's digital media ecology, it is users that are made personally accountable. In this paper I argue that it is informational

vulnerabilities that constitute the most profound new risk of our consumption and use of media today. Individuals are subject to a new form of informational insecurity, that is entangled in a connective and unbridled public in the pervasive recording and distributing of personal thoughts and acts, a part conscious sharing without sharing, which makes haunting one of the new risks of this age. The already everyday digital comments, consumption and acts, routinely recorded, posted, tagged, tweeted, and liked, make this the most accountable generation in history.

In brief, the definition of ‘media ecology’ I draw upon here is that used in Hoskins and Tulloch (2016: 8), namely: ‘the media imaginary (how and why media envision the world within a particular period or paradigm and its consequences) *and* our imaginary of the media of the day (how media are made visible or otherwise in that process of making the world intelligible), in which some ecologies are perceived as inherently more “risky” than others’. The study of media ecologies has a long history¹, and a survey is beyond the scope of this article. However, it is important to note a number of contributions that have identified key characteristics of a ‘new’ or ‘digital’ media ecology (Parikka 2005; Awan et al 2011; Merrin 2014; Trevisan et al 2016) particularly in relation to the organic nature of digital networks.

In this article, I argue that it is the loss of anonymity that is the greatest threat from media today. This is not just the commodification of the personal, with each individual’s details readily exchanged for access to a range of online services, but that overnight digital participation and exposure became the requisite for the maintenance of self identity and basic sociality. Risk media are defined by the fact that the smartphone has become the locus of us: an extended avatar of the self in terms of messages, relationships, who you know,

what web you look at, regularity of contacts, purchases and music tastes – an incomparable social and cultural hub.

The loss of anonymity is a *sociotechnical* risk, namely the enmeshment of the essential and everyday ways in which we are social with our dependency on digital communication devices and infrastructures. And it is precisely because of this enmeshment that it is so difficult to grasp the scale of the loss of anonymity and to forge a new consciousness of and in media.

To these ends I offer a vision of risk media that prompts remembrance of an earlier and much more benign media ecology, through which to illuminate what is at stake in the digital mundane. To achieve this I employ an interdisciplinary lens that mobilises the memory of media as well as highlighting the profound risk to the future of anonymity from shifts in the media of memory. I thus draw on the emergent subfield of 'digital memory studies' (Hoskins forthcoming) and I employ three of its central themes here, namely: (1) everyday media consumption, communication and participation is archival; we knowingly and unknowingly leave digital traces of our selves; (2) there is a diminishment of the predictable 'decay time' (Hoskins 2013) of media, that is pre-digital media forms were fairly reliable in their lifespans and the dissipation of memory of a given society, whereas today there is profound uncertainty between the extremes of accidental deletion and of the need for a 'right to be forgotten'; (3) both of the former open up a new individual and organizational vulnerability of 'emergence', of being haunted by sociotechnical living.

2. Communication and archive

A defining difference with previous media ecologies is that all of these consumption and communicational acts are fundamentally *archival*. Careless yet compulsive connectivity –

clicking, swiping, posting, linking, liking, tweeting and all digital acts of the publication and the often indiscriminate sharing of self, ensure that the unrecorded areas of our lives are shrinking fast. It can even be said that the act of recording has become more urgent than experiencing that which is being recorded. The end of anonymity opens up a newly uncertain future in which the archive has eclipsed the individual.

However, all this is not only the consequence of the running away of technology from the bounds of human perception so that it becomes increasingly difficult to fathom the workings of the algorithmic 'technological unconscious' that underpins much of daily life lived online and thus to take any meaningful action to re-secure the self. For a key driver of the end of anonymity is a new public viral culture of a 'right to know', so that all information – individual, organizational, governmental – is seen as fair game. The digitally fostered values of unbridled commentary, open access, freedom of information, the immediacy of instant search, and confessional culture, have increased the value of anonymity whilst at the same time making its attainment impossible. This paradox is one that is a product of our current digital media ecology, as Jill Lepore (2013) explains:

In the twentieth century, the golden age of public relations, publicity, meaning the attention of the press, came to be something that many private citizens sought out and even paid for. This has led, in our own time, to the paradox of an American culture obsessed, at once, with being seen and with being hidden, a world in which the only thing more cherished than privacy is publicity. In this world, we chronicle our lives on Facebook while demanding the latest and best form of privacy protection— ciphers of numbers and letters— so that no one can violate the selves we have so entirely contrived to expose².

And it is this comparison with an earlier and defining media ecology that is useful to draw in highlighting the rapidity and the scale of these changes. Thus to make claims of the nature and consequences of risk media and the end of anonymity I explicitly draw comparison with the the broadcast media era whose threats posed by media were mostly characterised in terms of ideology (brainwashing), ownership (concentrated in the hands of a few) and 'effects' (copycat violence). Although these threats may still persist in some ways, the fundamental digital risk today is that the user has become accountable for that use.

3. Emergence

The relative stability of the broadcast era of media has given way to a new individual and organizational vulnerability of emergence. Emergence I define as: the accidental or deliberate revealing of potentially transcendent missed or hidden or thought deleted images, videos, emails etc. emerging to transform what was known or thought to be known, about a person or organization and their acts. And for an example of the shift in emergence in only a quarter of a century, I just want to recount a short story from 1989.

I started my first university year at Lancaster in the autumn of 1989 when the North-West of England was being culturally shaped through the 'Madchester' music scene that spawned such era-defining bands as Happy Mondays, Inspiral Carpets and The Stone Roses. One student, 'Tom'— lived on my corridor in Halls on campus, and managed to see one of the seminal Stone Roses' gigs that year, with some other 27,000 fans. He took his 'university' girlfriend to the concert as he continued to go out with another girlfriend from his hometown: a relationship that preceded his new student life. Tom didn't negotiate these

relationships but merely managed their separation, i.e. his girlfriend at home had no knowledge of his relationship with his 'other' (university) girlfriend.

However, one day I met Tom walking down a Halls' corridor brandishing a national UK tabloid daily (circulation then of over five million). A photograph of a sea of fans at the Stone Roses concert from the day before was spread across the front page. Despite the crowd, clearly discernible at the front was Tom with his arm around his university girlfriend. The separation of his two private relationships was collapsed through the sudden publicness of one of them. 'The game's up' he said. 'She (home girlfriend) didn't even know I was going to the gig. Now the whole world knows. What are the chances of that happening?'

And that is a significant question: what *are* the chances of that happening? The sudden revelation or emergence of Tom's illicit relationship(s) was extremely improbable given the mass media of 1989. That was an era of news media restricted to print, radio and television. And yet, today, connectivity would have made it very difficult for Tom to manage his multiple relationships.

Today, in contrast, the archive eclipses the individual. In this way, a once functional relationship between media and memory has been made dysfunctional. It has long been said that human memory is notoriously fragile without external aid. Hence it has evolved with technological externalization and increased use and reliance on media forms and devices is seen to strengthen and enhance memory. And an array of disciplines, from philosophy to media studies, approach media as a key mechanism of augmenting, extending, and prosthetising human memory. But the digital throws the human-media memory relation into reverse. The self is eclipsed by the externally-held information held and circulating about him or her.

For example, today I can't remember much where I was on the 15 March 2016 or

where I travelled or by what means, or what conversations I had with others or with myself, what news I read, or what television programmes or films I watched, and what comments I made in response to my immersion in and uses of the twenty-first century media ecology. Yet the archival record of these activities and much much more remains in the array of my digital data traces, left knowingly or unwittingly. These are now circulating, repeating, searchable and sellable by others, accumulating the exchange value of my mediated memory in the digital knowledge economy.

In contrast, my memory of the 15 March 1986, to the extent that it remains and regardless of whether it is accurate or inaccurate, is (still) largely a human and private memory in that my documentation and my sharing of it had comprehensible limits. In that time, I communicated with and consumed media with little prospects of being haunted by these everyday acts. My 1986 mostly human, albeit supplemented by media, memory, has in 2016 been displaced by an algorithmic memory, a memory beyond my imagination and mostly beyond my control. And the pre-internet past is the one that has become something it never was; the media remnants of my 1980's self are no longer safe in their once presumed trajectories of decay and forgetting, being made vulnerable to digital hijacking today, as with scattered faded family photographs suddenly found and scanned and posted and tagged and linked and liked; this is the media shock of the old. As Laurence Scott (2015: xv) puts it: digitization 'contorts the old dimensions'.

If Tom was arriving at university some 15 years or more later we can ask how would his illicit relationship have been different? His leaving home and moving to university would have probably been already heavily premediated: linking in with prospective peers via an array of social media, as well as upon his arrival in Halls, connecting, entangling and making visible his past relationships and emergent encounters. His auto/biography would already

be entwined in post-scarcity culture: the digital self is fore/shadowed by the shadow archive. And even the supremely media literate who assiduously manage their digital presence (a small minority) cannot guarantee protection from the unintended or deliberate exposure of their increasingly networked lives.

It is an astonishing paradox that for all of the liveliness of the new active metaphors of the digital media ecology – a whole new ‘social’ media of sharing, posting, linking, and liking – any kind of self control, or active notion of remembering, is hostaged to the vagaries of the threat of emergence.

Emergence makes the future of memory contingent on the new infrastructures that host and make available that which becomes past. There is a paradox here. Whereas the notion of infrastructure is often associated with the continuity and stability and ultimately informational security, of systems that make things work, the very connective capacity of information infrastructures subject the future of memory to disruption and discontinuity through either instantaneous or time-lagged revelations that were simply not possible before.

The shift to a new socio-technical memory regime is that from scarcity (represented by the example of Tom, above) to a post-scarcity culture. Although many view the late twentieth century as the ‘media age’ in terms of the advances of electronic media, it compares as an age of invisibility in the light of the twenty-first century’s ‘connective turn’ (Hoskins 2011). Previously, the relative scarcity of the recording and dissemination of life ensured a certain degree of security of privacy and of the delimiting of the publicness of the everyday, of personal life. Individuals had relative control over their private lives in terms of them remaining private, and the institutions of ‘Big Media’ and State had relative control over access to and dissemination of the public archives of heritage, museums, broadcast

and other media content.

Today, no political leader, celebrity, royal or other public figure – or indeed anyone else – is protectable from the Network. It is not that those in public life have never been vulnerable to the mass exposure of their private and personal lives – good or bad, unwitting or deliberate – but today they unavoidably inhabit the equivocating media mesh, that catches and connects and coerces.

In the broadcast era – there was certainly a trend in evidence in public life: for instance, John Thompson writes in 1995 of a ‘transformation of visibility’. But this transformation still left a public sphere of sorts relatively intact. And there is continuity here, albeit with greater intensity as the news media’s reach has become ever more granular. For example, the UK’s deputy national security adviser Hugh Powell was not the first government official whose Cabinet papers have been caught in the zoom lens of the waiting photographers on his way to a ‘top secret’ meeting in Downing Street, in March 2014. Thus that whatever action Britain’s partners had in mind on the unfolding Ukraine crisis, now exposed to the world was Britain’s position that, she will ‘not support, for now, trade sanctions ... or close London's financial centre to Russians’³.

Elsewhere, although the rich and the famous and the powerful have always been the target of the snooping and the doggedly pursuing paparazzi, the news and tabloid and gossip media ‘revelations’ of the twenty-first century have become more relentless. The photographs taken (from a distance) in September 2012 of a topless Kate Middleton, the Duchess of Cambridge and a future Queen of England, whilst on holiday with her husband Prince William staying at a privately-owned chateau in Provence, is a continuation of this kind of prurient pursuit.

But once the photographs had been taken, the object of dispute (by lawyers acting

on behalf of the Royals attempting to prevent their further publication) is actually the object of the digital.

And very little can mitigate against the contagion of connectivity. Some speculate that attaining and enforcing copyright of the original images of Kate Middleton would have contained their circulation and future publication. However, the digital tide is unstoppable and there is no known inoculation against the virality of the network. In the words of a BBC Radio 4 news programme presenter: 'Type in the words 'Kate Middleton photographs' and you can find them'. Even mainstream news reminds us – and perhaps in awe – that Google is the supreme index of today's digital media ecology.

1980's media consumption and communication occurred in a relatively benign media ecology in which viewing and communicative acts were largely untraceable. Today digitally afforded consumption and communicative acts are archival by their very nature, the contemporary self is always already fused with its media ecology. This shift is one from a broadcast to a post-broadcast era, in which the disconnected audience has become today's networked users or participants. The individual has become a hybridized cipher of the past, producing, sifting, tagging, managing the flux of media and communication content. This is an environment where settings have become king: where new memory striations are made through Big Data's swamping of self, politics, culture. But a kind of security that is lost here was that that was once afforded by the certainty of the likely finitude of much of the media of the twentieth century. Today, by contrast, the new futures of emergence are subject to unpredictable times of media decay, and I now turn to address this issue of 'decay time'.

4. Decay time

Beyond the vagaries and forgetting of oral cultures, media's externalization of all-things-human, have long been seen to augment memory. But media have also kept memory in-check and held the past at some distance through their own in-built modes of decay. In this way media have been pre-eminent in forgetting. The decay time of media helped prevent the past from getting out of control, from accumulating beyond any one society's capacity to manage, make sense of, and use it. And this relative certainty of the decay time of pre-digital media ecologies afforded a sense of ontological security, or at least it didn't threaten it. Today the idea of continuous connectivity and digital networking subverts the very meaning of what it is to 'decay'. The digital image, message, video are all mutable compared with earlier media content. This is not some extension of the relatively passive moment of reception characteristic of a great deal of traditional media content. Rather, web 2.0 is a world in which much of the static web becomes displaced by content which is *generative* (Zittrain 2008) of evolution through its invitation to be commented on, added to, edited, circulated, liked, linked etc.

And social media is being recognised for its unpredictable archival aspects and as too risky for a generation that wants to live their digital lives in a more uninhibited fashion amongst their peers, without the constant monitoring of the increasingly social media-savvy panopticon of parents, teachers, and various other guardians of communication. This is reflected in the shift from social media to the 'ephemeral internet' including to decay-time sensitive apps such as YikYak and Snapchat.

For instance, think of the ways in which images are today routinely used as image-based communications, as messages in themselves (Van House and Churchill, 2008: 298). These may appear as transitory and ephemeral in terms of their instantaneous sending and receiving, and as relatively private in their restricted sending to a trusted other or to a small

group. However, the texting or messaging of such an image (or video) is subject to an increasingly exponential retrievability: from the sender's device, the receiver's, the network itself, from it being further shared with or without consent. In fact, the rise of the subfield of computer forensics is indicative of the accumulating value of and risk from the traces of digital lives available to be mined.

Thus the photo messaging app Snapchat can be seen as flawed attempt to create a medium without memory. Users can send photographs, videos and other media and send them as 'snaps' to another individual or to a chosen group and determine the amount of time (between 1 and 10 seconds) the recipient(s) can view them. After the designated time the snap is no longer viewable on the recipient's device and will also be deleted from Snapchat's servers. Sexting – the sending and exchange of sexually explicit messages – attracts a teenage user base to Snapchat, as unlike virtually all other digital media, guaranteeing the decay time of the content sent and thus offering a rare delimiting of an audience, a secrecy of sorts, in an era that is defined by the virality of so-called social media. Snapchat is also indicative of the compulsion of connectivity, of the desire to be connected through a sharing without sharing, also an example of the reciprocal or rather the obligatory nature of retweeting, following, linking and liking required to establish and sustain digital presence and value.

However, Snapchat's preeminent promise of accelerated decay time and ultimately permanent deletion does not appear very robust. Richard Hickman a computer forensics examiner working for a firm that specializes in the recovery of digital data for family law (according to their website to 'assist in uncovering the truth'⁴) found that the metadata of snaps remains and that images sent via snapchat are recoverable⁵. And Snapchat's guarantor of a security of forgetting through a technological solution was exposed as even

more fragile, when in January 2014, the service was hacked and usernames and phone numbers of 4.6 million Snapchat accounts were downloaded and temporarily posted online⁶.

The entanglement with media of the self and the end of anonymity makes the decay time of media suddenly matter a lot more. This entanglement is not accidental but part of the now routinized management of identities, relationships and reputations, via digital immersion. For instance, as Floridi puts it: 'We use and expose information about ourselves to become less informationally indiscernible' (2013: 13). Yet this – today routine – exposure is a profoundly risky enterprise.

The immediacy, pervasiveness and volume of available digital data about everyone does not respect hierarchies or elites. The revelations of Wikileaks⁷, the 2013 US surveillance scandal, and the 2016 Panama Papers leak⁸, all reveal how informationally vulnerable the digital past has become. The rapid development of the culture of hacking is indicative of new individual and mass informational insecurity. This is in contrast to a more predictable vulnerability embedded in traditional medial decline and decay within which time the relative generational stability of memory was both defined and maintained.

Thus digital virality is indiscriminate in entangling a multitude of actors and activities and collapsing the private and public spheres in a new digital maelstrom of what was in the broadcast era a more separable and containable public sphere of news. And although broadcast era media have long been maligned for being driven by the exigencies of immediacy and brevity at the expense of any kind of journalistic depth or substance, today these debates are paled by a digitally-inspired culture of speculative ransacking of almost all areas of life.

This is not just the new mass of the bloggers and the Twitterati carving out a new public sphere, rather it is the informal media's hyperconnectivity (Hoskins and Tulloch 2016) in and with that which is just discernible as mainstream news. One example of this new contagion that feeds a new assault on the past in post-scarcity culture is the hounding of an innocent man in the 2010s. This period is marked particularly in the UK by a post-scarcity avalanche of claims, speculations, investigations and prosecutions for historical child abuse that enabled some victims to come forward who had felt unable or unwilling and others who had spoken out before but who had not been believed or taken seriously.

In November 2012, the hyperconnectivity of post-scarcity delivered the beginning of an institutional crisis in the UK – of police, of government and of journalism – in the convergence of three key scandals, either emergent at the time or being seen anew through fresh revelations about them. For example, the respected UK's *Channel 4 News* programme combined these scandals into an overarching investigation to declare that the past itself was on trial⁹. The scandals brought together in this news reporting were: firstly, over 400 lines of police inquiry dating back to 1959 into allegations of sexual abuse by the BBC TV presenter Jimmy Savile, who was part of Britain's popular cultural fabric for decades; secondly, new claims about systematic abuse at children's homes in North Wales in the 1970s and 80s; and, thirdly, allegations about the role of the police and a cover-up in the 1989 Hillsborough tragedy when 96 people died and hundreds were injured at a human crush at a football stadium in Sheffield.

This news reporting was part of a reevaluation of the kind of place Britain was to live in over a significant period from the latter half of the twentieth century, particularly in the individual and institutional complicity in child abuse and in other scandals especially involving powerful men. For example, as the journalist and broadcaster Rosie Boycott

reflects: 'For the paedophile, this must have been an amazing place to live in'.¹⁰ Yet, unlike earlier periods of emergence (of scandal) hyperconnectivity mediates a febrile environment in which to put the past on trial, and the convergent crisis of legitimacy in the 'establishment' in the UK reveals some key challenges for memory which I now turn to address.

The *Channel 4 News* reporting was in part a response to an earlier chain of accusation, counter-accusation, and denial, over allegations made by the BBC's *Newsnight*. This flagship BBC current affairs television programme aired an investigation into allegations made by Steven Messham – who had publicly revealed his abuse as a child in a care home in North Wales in the 70s and 80s. Messham claimed that a 'senior Conservative politician of the Thatcher years' had abused him. Following the broadcast of this report, the hyperconnectivity across social media, microblogging sites and mainstream (including online) news, propelled a new contagion of speculation as to the identity of Messham's abuser. This case demonstrates just how powerful a critical digital mass of speculation is in attaining an authoritative force not so easily attainable through earlier or traditional media forms and discourses of scandal. For example, even a physical list of suspects described by a presenter as being taken 'from the internet', was thrust into the hands of the UK Prime Minister live on a daytime UK TV chat show.

The person revealed on much of the informal online media as being identified by Messham was Lord McAlpine, a former UK Conservative Party treasurer. McAlpine was forced to make a statement defending himself and strongly protested his innocence claiming that this was a case of mistaken identity. McAlpine was right and was wholly innocent, for Messham upon seeing an actual photograph of McAlpine, acknowledged his mistake and made a statement apologising to McAlpine and his family for his error.

The speculative momentum suddenly had nowhere to go, other than back to the original BBC *Newsnight* report – which hadn't actually named McAlpine, but had broadcast Messham's allegations almost hinting that everyone knew who he was accusing, or at least in a knowing way as to where this speculation was public. With the subject of the accusations now deemed innocent, the original *Newsnight* report now looked vulnerable as very poor journalism and in a trail by the very same contagion, the crisis-laden BBC lost another Director General in December 2012.

However, in these intensely viral circumstances, what are the prospects for Lord McAlpine's redress for the false accusations and damage to his reputation and upset to himself and to his family? The BBC as a Big Media institution is governed by clear regulatory guidelines enshrined in law and duly delivered compensation to the maligned McAlpine. However, the challenge for McAlpine (and his solicitors) was how to pursue damages against those on Twitter who had wrongly named him as Messham's abuser. The approach seemed to be one of assessing damage to reputation in terms of the scale of exposure. In the simple terms of numbers of followers on Twitter this is easy to quantify, and McAlpine did not pursue damages against Twitter users who had named him with fewer than 500 followers in return for a modest charity donation. Others with a more substantial Twitter following were however subject to legal claims against them. The House of Commons Speaker's wife, Sally Bercow, for example, was found guilty of libel for a tweet sent two days after the *Newsnight* original report. It read: 'Why is Lord McAlpine trending? *Innocent face*', for which she had to pay undisclosed damages¹¹. Yet, the impact of the contagion of social media and (micro)blogging sites is not effectively scalable in reputational damage terms. There is no equivalent to hashtag in the established media, there is memory in the long tail.

Again, this is evidence of the convergence of communication with archive and the ambiguous status of this media in the entangling of, in Sally Bercow's terms, the ephemeral 'conversational and mischevious'¹² with a medium ill-defined by reach or by decay. And when every comment is a publication, when every conversation is an archive, the former era of media scarcity looks increasingly precious in its reassuring much greater capacity for decay and for forgetting.

5. Conclusion

And so it is precisely earlier media ecologies that need reinvigorating in twenty-first century consciousness, to demonstrate the shifts in complexity and scale and to afford some kind of anchorage for comprehending digital risk amidst the flux of today's ahistorical media theory. Only then will policy-makers and others who claim to seek to arrest the loss of anonymity will recognise the futility of seeking solutions that are symptomatic – rather than a recognition of – a kind of new media ontology. For example, the loss of control over privacy, identity, and reputation has belatedly caught the attention of policy makers, as found in Article 17 of the European proposal for a General Data Protection Regulation which seeks to offer a 'right to be forgotten and to erasure'. This much debated move is however only the symptom of the problem of risk media and not a solution. It is impossible to legislate against lives lived through hyperconnectivity: copying, editing, posting, sharing, linking, liking, which atomize as well as aggregate memory of the self and make its indiscriminately accountable for all of its digital presences.

This is all something of reversal of Floridi's observation (above) that: 'We use and expose information about ourselves to become less informationally indiscernible' (2013: 13). On a much longer historical scale, the production of information can be seen as a

principal mechanism of not being forgotten. Writing before the digital era, Flusser sees this finally being realized only with the advent of non-material media: 'All information must decay if it is stored in a material medium' (2011/1985: 108). He argues: 'Only since the advent of electromagnetic images, immaterial, pure information, can we hope to escape the curse of being forgotten. Only now can we fabricate memories over which nature has no power. Telematic society is the first answer to the previously inevitable decay of all culture and everything associated with it into the void of oblivion, into death'(ibid.) Flusser died in 1991 but was quite prophetic in imagining the new challenges to be posed by the removal of the requirement of materiality as supporting information, arguing that 'the concept of "forgetting" will have to acquire a new and fully adjustable meaning...' (2011/1985:110).

And the European proposal to extend forgetting as a 'right' is a reflection of the extent to which inhabiting the digital media ecology requires a new orientation to the profound risks inherent in the routine activities of being connected and the exposing of one's self to media without clearly defined parameters. This might have had a chance of success in the 1990's notion of 'the internet' as a manageable space in which various representations of the self were imaginable as discrete and remote entities (we used to log in to 'remote' servers) and thus under some kind of remote control alike a single web page. The connective turn however has entangled the self through even what appear as the most routine of communications (texts, emails, posts) into the new 'curse' (in Flusser's terms) of not being forgotten amidst a new fluid decay time of media.

To escape the curse of not being forgotten and the seeking of the re-securing of privacy and the diminishment of individual accountability for one's digital presence and trails, are challenges which today are met with the proffering of more or alternative tech. For example, the *New York Times* recently ran an article headed: 'Worried About the Privacy

of Your Messages? Download Signal', urging its readers to use this free encrypted messaging service which 'retains virtually no information from users, including messages and address books, on its servers'¹³. But this kind of 'solutionism' (Morozov 2013) is symptomatic of the individual as 'application' of 'various services and interconnections that quickly become the dominant or exclusive ontological template of one's social reality' (Jonathan Crary 2013: 43). In other words, the sociotechnical self is already too embedded in the digital ecology to be able to break from it, or imagining what a break would look like.

In sum, the very accumulation of digital content awaiting prospective emergence renders a new perpetual haunting by an almighty dormant memory. Most forms of media consumption and communication today are simply no longer private or containable – they are subject to a generalized risk of virality and emergence. And this risk is not just to individuals, but pervades across social and cultural worlds, unsettling institutions, organizations, governments. And the prospects of anonymity are proportional to our extrication from digital trails, in other words, a very visible and accountable future has already been set up.

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Notes

¹ See Fuller 2007 for a comprehensive account.

² Jill Lepore, "The Prism: Privacy in an Age of Publicity," *New Yorker*, June 24, 2013, http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2013/06/24/130624fa_fact_lepore?currentPage=all&mobify=0 (accessed May 26, 2014).

³ Jonathan Freedland (2014) 'No 10's Ukraine gaffe shows City profits come before principled diplomacy', *The Guardian, Comment is Free*, 4 March 2014 (accessed 4 March 2014).

⁴ <http://decipherforensics.com/index.php/blog-landing-page/56-snapchat>, accessed 2 January 2014.

⁵ 'Snapchat's expired snaps are not deleted, just hidden' <http://www.theguardian.com/media-network/partner-zone-infosecurity/snapchat-photos-not-deleted-hidden>, accessed 3 January 2014.

⁶ 'Snapchat hack affects 4.6 million users', <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-25572661>, accessed 2 January 2014.

⁷ Wikileaks is an organization devoted to disclosure via online publication and archiving of confidential, secret and classified information, sourced anonymously.

⁸ This was the leak (first reported via the 'Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project' and a consortium of international journalists on the 3 April 2016) of over 11 million files from the law firm,

Mossack Fonseca, which revealed how the wealthy (including 143 politicians from numerous nations) had been exploiting secretive offshore tax regimes

⁹ <http://www.channel4.com/news/past-on-trial-a-national-watershed>, accessed 9 November 2012.

¹⁰ Rosie Boycott speaking on Channel 4 News, Channel 4, broadcast 8 November 2012.

¹¹ See Joshua Rozenberg's commentary: Sally Bercow learns the social media rules the hard way in McAlpine case: <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2013/may/24/sally-bercow-social-media-macalpine>, accessed 16 June 2013.

¹² http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/05/24/lord-mcalpine-sally-bercow-twitter_n_3330483.html, accessed 16 June 2013.

¹³ Brian X. Xhen, 'Worried About the Privacy of Your Messages? Download Signal', *New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/07/technology/personaltech/worried-about-the-privacy-of-your-messages-download-signal.html?_r=0. (Accessed December 7, 2016).