



An “approximate knowledge”: event transmission in the post-9/11 informational culture

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2011, the year marking the 10th anniversary of 9/11, was ushered in by unprecedented upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt and asymmetric border conflict on Italian shores prompted by massive inter-Mediterranean migration. These events took place while a devastating earthquake hit Japan, unleashing a nuclear alert and triggering a (new) downfall for world economy. 2011 is also a symbolic date signaling the definite erosion of social policies in Europe and the U.S., as budget cuts to public institutions in countries like Italy, Greece and the U.K. are provoking a strong response by the civil society. While I write this essay, the Libyan conflict pulses on the geopolitical map, whilst echoes of the North African revolutions resound in Syria, Yemen and other Middle Eastern countries. To this chain of events adds a simmering unrest that cannot be pinned to an isolatable cause, although it contributes to amplify a contagious feeling of disorientation that takes different shapes as it affects different locations and subjectivities.

This partial overview already suggests that in the last decade the global scenario has been rocked by waves of mobilization which the media contribute to spread by addressing different occurrences as so many manifestations of agitation and chaos. Among the sources of media alarmism are the 2004 tsunami that razed the Pacific; the earthquake in Haiti; hurricane Katrina; the war on terror and the ensuing globalization of terrorism, as well as the election of Barack Obama to the U.S. presidency, the regime change in Cuba and the assassination of Osama bin Laden in May 2011. On all these



occasions, their potentially upsetting impact has provided journalists, scholars, politicians and public spokespersons with the means to employ the abstract notion of “event” to evoke a suspension of our habitual modes of existence.

In philosophical terms, an event is “a unique instant of production in a continual flow of changes evident in the cosmos” (Parr 2005: 22). It signals the crossing of a threshold that subtracts predictability to the future, creating a moment of unbinding where experimentation takes the place of repetition and reproduction, demanding that we reformulate our relationship with the world. For a large number of scholars, no other phenomenon in contemporary history embodies the crisis and radical estrangement that accompany the event more than 9/11.¹ It has become commonsensical to describe 9/11 as the event par excellence: a terrorist act so great as to engender a domino effect that has involved ruptures, repositionings and displacements across a multiplicity of levels, going from the micropolitical to the macropolitical and the global. This view is entwined with, and indeed magnified by, media discourses that have turned the broadcasting of the attacks into a media event in itself, rich in spectacularization, shock and ritual. The criticism on media events, such as the televisual airing of 9/11, suggests that these are “co-productions” of perpetrators and broadcasters (Katz and Liebes 2007, 164) which produce a specific modality of experiencing critical situations. This interpretation is relevant to the present analysis in that it points to the co-implication of different actors in the explosion of a supposedly unmediated moment of production. In the hypermediated environment in which we live, events, that is, seem to be always at risk of being captured in a web of interests and relations that threaten to domesticate their potential for displacement and change.²

Keeping in mind the event cartography of the decade 2001-11 that is tentatively drawn in the above paragraph, this essay argues that 9/11 provides a starting point to explore the uses to which the media put the concept of the event in relation to the transformations that span the beginning of the 21st century. Rather than approaching 9/11 in absolute terms, as a phenomenon unencumbered by the territorializing pull of its own geopolitical genealogy, the essay focuses on the serialization of the event and on its relationship with codification and reactualization. The underlying assumption is that, in the last decade, the event has recurred both as a discursive hook in communication and politics, as well as an ontological pull towards bottom-up social mobilization. Within this changing horizon, 9/11 surfaces as a node of performativity,

¹ This is true especially from the point of view of scholarly criticism in that 9/11 is, by far, the most analyzed terrorist event since the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

² In this light, 9/11 shows that the event lays at the juncture of epistemology and ontology, being the representative category in use when the passage of a threshold occurs and the progressivist concept of time as an undisturbed linear advancement is displaced by the eruption of uncontrollable forces.



“momentarily stand[ing] out of a mass before falling back into it” (Thrift 2008: 222). The attacks cannot be regarded as the direct cause behind the sequence of events that the media have fed us. However, their digital and analog afterlife through television, cinema, newspapers, the Net and the way in which they have instantiated a very specific model of audiovisual experience, is paradigmatic to investigate the dynamics of excess and containment that the event engenders, occupying the central hub in a topology of unbalance that has persisted until today, albeit in a metamorphic fashion and according to differential speeds of materialization and a non deterministic relational dynamics.

THE GENEALOGY OF THE EVENT

Underlying our present perfect runs a genealogy of the event. An examination of the sensationalistic techniques by which media, politicians and pundits describe phenomena as different as sports and media events, general elections, global health emergencies or natural disasters suggests that the abstract category of the event is undergoing linguistic territorialization. Whereby, theoretically speaking, the event is something that goes unregistered, in media politics it has instead become a catchword that performs ideas of immediacy, rupture, spontaneity and affective involvement for the benefit of demanding and elusive publics. Although media events have always been part of communication (as in the case of Roosevelt’s fireside speeches during World War II or the Hindenburg disaster in 1937), they seem to have acquired growing prominence after 9/11. Indeed, far from being a metaphysical manifestation that confirmed America’s role as a global power, the list of occurrences that, since 2001, the media has dubbed as events places 9/11 in a feedback loop characterized by the return of the event as a code, occupying a middle ground in between epistemology and ontology, communication and becoming. If, on the one hand, the event prompts the experimentation of new modes of collective mobilization, as exemplified by recent European and North African anti-government demonstrations, on the other, it is the object of a dispositif of subjectivation that enforces domination and social control by and through specific techniques of communication.

The colonization of the social imaginary by media events problematizes the prominent representation of 9/11 as a ‘watershed’ moment that is found in scholarly literature. Indisputably, it will be remembered as an experience of displacement, although of a normative fashion. The trace of the event in 9/11 is represented by the radical reformulation that it engendered of the concepts of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’



within a tautological frame by which the more social control is imposed the most should we feel free. From a 2011 perspective, however, the supposed event of the attacks presents a paradox that relates with circulation and emergence. On the one hand, 9/11 is generally described as an isolated historical experience that happened in a specific moment in time. Politicians and broadcasting networks recursively evoke the memory of the attacks to reinforce a nationalistic discourse and its corollary of repression. On the other hand, the attacks are embedded in a larger dynamics that places them at the heart of a timeline of events. Such temporal dimension returns to the idea of event as ongoing unbinding, and refers to a process of emergence where different phenomena feed back upon one another, producing a flux of turbulence that goes beyond the singularity of 9/11.

THE POLITICS OF THE EVENT

What happens if we engage 9/11 as the mark on a threshold which has discharged a shockwave of emergence? Is it possible to investigate the event as something that reboots itself, self-perpetuating as a process, rather than a singular, isolatable occurrence? The assumption behind a revisitation of 9/11 on its tenth anniversary is that we approach it as the agent that accelerated an undergoing dynamics of mobilization with significant implications for the ways we communicate and experience change. In this scenario, the media play a fundamental role as the privileged channels of “affective modulation” (Massumi 2005a) and is to them that we turn to explore how 9/11 functions as a perceptual attractor around which new dynamics of social engagement and capture have formed and unfolded in the last decade.

Although the transmission of information takes place in a compressed, hypermutating temporal dimension, where the shock of events is rapidly transmuted into a “stable range of the periodic table of collective emotion” (Massumi 2011), it is also true that the turbulence connected to 9/11 has never been archived and that the media still invoke its memory to engage the audience at the emotive level. This strategy of media engagement is an event of the senses that involves a dynamics of action-reaction that cannot be analyzed in behavioral or deterministic ways, but that it nevertheless manifests itself in heightened levels of audience responsiveness to media solicitations relating to themes as different as terrorism, insecurity, precarity, crisis etc. In spite of the linguistic refashioning of the war on terror as “overseas contingency operation”, for example, Obama’s promises of “hope” only update Bush’s invocations of “fear” to incite collective mobilization. In both instances, the political address seeks



to intervene in the life of the population, pressing on affect to urge for collective participation, however not in a uniform and homogeneous fashion. Bush's 'culture of fear' has undoubtedly elicited a social concern on terrorism but it cannot be said that it guaranteed the government unconditional support on the Iraq war, for example. Likewise, Obama's call for hope drew to the polls thousands of disaffected voters but it is also breeding discontent from electors that are unwilling to embrace the sacrifices that come with "change".

In an article relating to 9/11, Brian Massumi (Massumi 2005b) investigates the implications of using the event as a platform of political engagement. The scholar observes that the affective reverberations of phenomena of radical rupture, as was the attack on the Twin Towers, have a political operativity that harbors a structural element of risk. The case of 9/11 is paradigmatic because it shows that affective instability (shock, terror, alarm) can be solicited for control purposes. The devising of the spectrum of colors by which the American government measures the level of terrorist threat, uses chromatic variations to impact on the nervous system of its population and invite a positive response to strong security policies. But the domain of intervention of this system is unqualified action or, in Massumi's words, "whatever-activity". Whatever-activity defines not a specific action, but the tendency to act, the ability of an individual or collective body to change its state and produce a micro-event of affective alteration, as experiencing panic or fear would be. Because the consequences of this activation cannot be predicted, it remains unreliable for political purposes.

For the purposes of an investigation on media and the event, it is necessary to stress that the political/communication machine shares some features with neoliberal thought as both address "growth factors", or "powers to be" (*Ibid.*),

Considering that doses of rest and entertainment are necessary to maintain productivity, and that everything from educating to eating to caring to clothing help increase it, whatever an individual does in life becomes an economic factor. The [media] system runs on life capital, 'human capital' (*Ibid.*).

In post-9/11 times, political productivity measures the opacity of whatever-activities as a source of mobilization. Elusive and volatile, affective alteration is politically operative because it stirs something, capturing attention and inviting an emotive investment in ways that make a universe of undetectable social micro-events exploitable. As demonstrated by Bush's initial successful mobilization of fear to launch his neocolonial adventures in the East, the affective address disseminated by the media can modulate social habits and turn a population of citizens-viewers into a reactive collectivity.

My argument refers to the political investment in becoming to trace a genealogy of 9/11 that makes room for a renegotiation of its legacy in terms that do not privilege



ideological interpretations of media productions, or diachronic analyses of the informational dynamics connected to the attacks. So far, I have rather strived to foreground how the dynamics of collective mobilization initiated by the 2001 terrorist event have been virtualized and revirtualized through the communicative spectrum as a media event. It is not enough that this catchword becomes the epistemological passe-partout for an understanding of the weight of emotional address for political purposes. Interpretation would not suffice to address the push to action, the mobilization of life's growth factors that invest our media culture as it materializes at the intersection of the social and the technological, the political and the economic, the material and the immaterial. The apparently seamless absorption of life into political re-productivity discloses the ontological implications of an informational culture where urgency and connectivity, as affective micro-events, foreclose the operative nature of affective investment.

9/11 AS A MEDIA EVENT

In order to clarify the implications of this analysis, a detour through the history and scholarly response to post-9/11 informational dynamics ensues. When 9/11 seized television it was unanimously addressed as a phenomenon that did not belong to the order of representation. Writing in its immediate aftermath, Jean Baudrillard (2001) described it as "the mother of events", the "essence of all the events that never happened". Similarly, Jacques Derrida (2002) spoke of a faltering of meaning in the presence of something that forces us to admit our inability to describe the future. The shocking hijacking of four American airplanes and their morphing into weapons of mass destruction rang as the alarm that abruptly awakened the U.S. from its post-1989 dreams of global domination. As the first attack on American soil since Pearl Harbor, 9/11 was instantly codified as the distillation of pure and unrepeatable exceptionality.

Such a reading evokes the absolutist vocabulary of consternation, rupture and reconstruction that Americans adopted on the occasion of president John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963. These instances reveal the complication of the philosophical and of the media event. In both of them an abuse of habeas corpus and sovereignty is regarded as an interruption that affects the life rhythms of a collectivity, provoking a displacement that is also the conduit for the carnal revelation of an as-yet unexpressed crisis. In theoretical terms, Kennedy's death and 9/11 can both be regarded as singularities: "turning points and points of inflection; [...] points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety, 'sensitive' points" (Derrida 2003). As such they share a disruptive quality that might be traced back to an event invested



with the force to hack a system's homeostasis and spring a body into action, triggering a process of becoming where "tears and joy" incarnate a virtually infinite range of manifestations, or lack thereof.

An experience of rupture and emotional displacement proclaims the event a time bomb: something "unspeakable" and "unimaginable" (Mitchell 2005) that belongs to the ontological dimension of becoming and desire, of passions whose effects are yet to unfold. The "pregnant pause" (*Ibid.*) that the event engenders is abstract productivity, energetic deployment and systemic reconfiguration that brings together being and knowledge in a radical mobilization of the status quo. With reference to 9/11, the echoes of this mobilization of a system's capacity to receive and respond to an external shock have informed a widespread redefinition of the economic, cultural and political priorities of the American government, but also of the modes of transmission of information across a networked and expanding media sphere.

The effect of the latter was sensed in the "dense transversal traffic of news and commentary, direct reporting and critical interventions, of new web pages and web logs, [...] [that] whipped the Internet into a kind of electronic frenzy" (Terranova 2004b: 71), as well as in the instantaneous, massive realignment of all major television channels and newspapers with governmental war and security policies. Immediately, the terrorist event overlapped and mutated into a media event that unfolded in infinite micro-occurrences, interacting with one another across a transmediatic plane that interlinked television with radio, mobile phones, newspapers, satellite platforms, the Net, electrified by the passage of competing and interlaced passions. A networked affective solicitation of urgency drew the global population to experience the reality of the attacks as an instance of collective, although highly diversified, mobilization that sized communication.

The impact of this experience of intensification of media dynamics on the production of culture has been extensively analyzed in scholarly works seeking to explore how 9/11 "continues to resonate in an endlessly proliferating aftermath of meanings that have changed and continue to change" (Birkenstein, Froula and Randell 2010: 2). This approach isolates 9/11 from the process of emergence in which it is embedded to expose its nature as a media event. The literature mostly dissects post-9/11 cultural representations to collect linguistic and semiotic evidence of the colonization of the West's imaginary by a disturbing rhetoric that uses an experience of unqualified, affective productivity to promote social control and militarism.

Moving from the assumption that representation is always the product of a relationship between knowledge and power, such works respond to the call that Judith Butler (2001) launched after 9/11 when she pressed for an attack to the "hegemonic grammar" of the war on terror. A linguistic/discursive focus serves scholars to expose the implications at work behind the recurring political message



that informs the majority of media productions circulated after 9/11. As Lynn Spigel (2004) declares, the transformation of 9/11 in a global media event has come into being through entertainment wars unfolding on the apparently unbiased ground of television programming. The broadcasting of programs such as the Oprah Winfrey Show or South Park, which openly addressed the reality of the attacks, turned into an occasion to perform a collective ritual of passage that intended to ferry Americans away from innocence and into the crude reality of (state-sponsored) violence. Exploring the cultural dynamics of meaning production from such a perspective exposes the functioning of a colonization of the event for ideological intents that aims at turning hypersolicited audiences into an engaged public sphere through “the straining between the mytho-historical and the private subjective” (Vincent 2010: 49).

One of the most pressing concerns arising from these ideological deconstructions then regards the capture and appropriation, on the part of American media and politics, of the affective address of an event and its use for propagandistic purposes. Different analyses emphasize that there is a sense in which the “growth factors” discharged by informational overflow and desiring production have been disciplined by way of their association with a material referent, as would be the revelation of the hijackers’ identities or the cathartic experience of a God-inspired war in the Middle East (Spigel 2004). This scenario highlights the functioning of a media mechanism of identification between the subjective and the collective experience of the attacks that serves to evacuate the event of its most gaping, alarming thrust and substitute it with the stabilizing pull of interpretation and reasoning. In this sense, codification, as the operative mechanism of media representation, is invested with the power to secure uncontrollable panic and neutralize its destabilizing impact on society. As Patrice Pedro and Andrew Martin (2006) note, the twenty-first century politics of anti-terrorist war is at one with communication, because in the aftermath of the attacks the mediation of television, radio, internet, cinema provided the principal vehicle to normalize the deepening of social control policies.

Emphasizing the symbiotic relation between immaterial discursive production and material warfare, these interpretations refer to codification as if it was a tactical weapon able to domesticate the threat of destabilization: translating shock (unqualified affect) into trauma (domesticated emotion). To return to the grammar of the event, it is a bodily feeling, such as the one that has made Americans shed tears of pain and mourning, that tips the scale of political (dis)equilibrium, marking the limit of how far our response to media-induced invitations to action can go before it becomes uncontrollable. While fear is productive of the collective endorsement of a governmental resolution to attack a sovereign state on false allegations, terror is threatening because it implies an irrational, asignifying involvement that might likewise result in anarchy. What works such as Pedro and Martin’s do not sufficiently



address then, is how codification overlaps with affective modulation in the deployment of a new mode of collective activation.

THE ONTOLOGY OF EVENT TRANSMISSION

The focus on signification eschews from exploring the implications behind the ontological notion of the event as a productive force of becoming. For the purposes of this essay, this entails coupling the discursive approach with an interest in the system of attention capture, emotional engagement and socialization that governs contemporary informational dynamics to see how the media event of 9/11 resonates with contemporary phenomena of bottom-up mobilization that make a subversive use of networked media.

Indeed, from the perspective of media sociology, 9/11 has ushered in a period of excitation that is changing our practices of communication. In the last decade, the shift in informational dynamics towards investment and activation has been evident in the dissemination of terror-stricken media alerts, in the organization of spontaneous flash mobs, in the altered pace by which online petitions travel or ran aground along a symbiotic membrane that approximates the Net and the physical world, in the experimentation with forms of viral cybersquatting and engrossing cyber and networks. Furthermore, it has also informed a reconfiguration of security measures towards virtualization and containment. The pace of an international conflict, such as the war on terror, is paradigmatically governed by algorithmic calculus and experiences with synergy and connectivity among competing actors, such as the ones that brought to the the creation of the National Joint Terrorist Task Force and of the Investigative Data Warehouse in the U.S.

In both instances, the aim is to devise adequate strategies to respond to the unfolding of events of large magnitude, spanning terrorist bombings, genetic mutations, weather alterations etc. This speculative approach to future actualization, or virtuality, employs abstract elements, such as data management and forecasting, to act on time, predetermining upcoming manifestations of systemic change, that is, events. The gaseous, highly turbulent behavior that the security discourse attributes to risk foregrounds the productive nature of the event's mobilization in terms that update our interpretation of informational exchange. Events are foundational of our current communication culture because they determine the co-implication of emergence and preemption, becoming and control with mobilization and the production of desire.



Present events further help us to grasp the extent of the ways in which this processual notion of event-as-becoming governs our informational milieu. In the face of the swarming unrest that pervades contemporary living, scholars talk about a revolutionary ferment and hail new media, such as digital cameras, mobile phones or iPads, and platforms of online aggregation, like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, as the designated vectors of change. The referent of these considerations is represented by the uprisings and demonstrations organized through digital media in Greece, U.K., Italy, Egypt, Baharain, Tunisia, etc. Increasingly, the North African revolutions figure as the epitome of the ontological turbulence linked to the event. Their idiosyncratic rhythms of emergence and dissemination are transmitted and intensified through communication practices that resound with the differential speeds of daily living.

Commentators observe that status updates, frantic information exchanges, the breakneck circulation of viral videos of police brutality, demonstrations, flash mobs etc. are aiding in the circumvention of censorship and media shutdowns, speeding up the transmission of (supposedly) unmediated messages from otherwise impenetrable locations, like areas of conflict that official channels of communication are not able to access. Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) reports in his blog that the resignation of Hosni Mubarak from the Egyptian presidency was made possible by an intertwined dynamics of online socialization and mobilized looking. His argument places informational dynamics at the heart of a revirtualization, that is a re-transmission, of the rupturing power of the event away from the territorializing pull of mainstream media. The scholar grapples with the emergence of an experience that grows and mutates as it is circulated and transformed through different technologies and forms of participation and action that involve different strategies of socialization taking place among and through the media.

January 2011 has been a month of watching al-Jazeera's English channel streamed live on the Internet and following Twitter #sidibouid and #jan 25 as we watched first Tunisia and then Egypt undertake networked revolutions. [...] This time the spectre of revolution has returned with a difference. It is not a spectre hidden in Roman dress, behind a winding sheet, or in the battle armour worn by Hamlet's father. It is live (*Ibid.*, my italics).

This statement about the immediacy of informational emergence calls attention to the insistent, instantaneous presentness of practices of communication that are seemingly at one with revolutionary becoming. The informational culture to which Mirzoeff refers cannot be described only as a realm of meaning production or vacuous spectacularization. The knowledge we have of how messages are encoded and disseminated through the network of communication and the way they initiate dynamics of cultural and political production remains approximate, simmering in the brood of passion, living and desiring in which communication is embedded. The event



of informational circulation rather takes place as a distribution of movement and desire embodied in the pulsing that interlinks the material and immaterial spheres of communication, the 'human' and the 'machine'. We are not only interpellated via ideological messages, but embedded, in a generative crop that expands at the rhythm of our speed of connection, in tune with the action-reaction dance of resonating, interconnected bodies. Like witnessing the spectacle of the scarred Manhattan skyline unfold and mutate through infinite retransmissions, the information exchange prompted, for example, by the events at Fukushima, Benghazi or Abidjan, uncovers the existence of modalities of engagement and response to media addresses that energize meaning production, investing action with a new urgency. Indeed, there seems to be an underlying, corporeal drive in communication, which calls attention to the role played by desire in our cultural and political mobilization.

Engaging with the North African events through the hypercompressed indexing of Twitter hashtagging (“#sidibouid and #jan 25”) and live online broadcasting, Mirzoeff’s impromptu analysis brings us back to virtuality and emergence, showing that media events are instances of a time dimension that is at the heart of the debate on the so-called “revolution 2.0”. The presentness of information transmission that materializes as a flow of inputs and outputs inundating multiple channels and taking up a variety of forms (from unedited documentary footage, to talk shows, instant messaging, the creation of thematic groups on Facebook, newspaper editorials, radio broadcasts) makes it hard to conceive of media communication exclusively in the spatialized terms of semiotic proliferation. The mounting ephemerality with which we, as users and audiences, aggregate and disaggregate across virtual and real spaces, the spontaneous emergence and self-organization of media events, as well as the visceral, almost ‘gutsy’ seizure that instant messaging exerts on our senses (most notably on touch) suggest that the productive nature of communication should be investigated through the complex and complexifying filter of the incipient, generative productivity of desire.

EVENT TRANSMISSION

The theory of affect aids in the task to explore what could be termed a form of event transmission. Indeed, affect is an agent of movement and transformation that allows us to address transmission as an experience that entails a recombination of the material forces of social mobilization and control with a symbiotic exchange between images, sounds and the human sensoria. Affect is the elemental force behind the politics of relation and interconnectedness that animate the social web, as well as our



engagement with a work of art, a movie, or a sports game on television. Most of all, it is the tie that binds the economic, the social and the political, the national and the transnational, the material and the immaterial, the social and the pre-social in kaleidoscopic and ever-mutating assemblages. Event transmission, as an affective experience, is not the same as communication, if we take the latter to be a modality of relating meaningful messages (Terranova 2004).

However, the production of desire and the mobilizing power of affective transmission are always also implicated in strategies of control that strive to channel energization towards predetermined aims. The relationship between becoming and information circulation has been at the heart of political experimentations with securization and social resistance in the post-9/11 decade and it must be taken up by sociological research to kick-start an approach to media dynamics that would address the intertwining of the affective and the signifying in informational cultures.

In the speeches Bush delivered after the attacks, the affectively productive nature of the event informs an interpretation of the Biblical motif of “good versus evil” that the former President ascribes to Islam’s destructive drives against a supposedly innocent West. Notoriously, he claims that the crash of the Towers precipitated the world into darkness and pledges to turn the destructive wave of hatred on its head, converting it into a virtuous endeavor of “freedom”. Here, a momentary interruption of Western domination is transformed in a force of re-territorialization that, in Bush’s picture, will root Americans’ feet more robustly into the ground of patriotic military and cultural support. His unfaltering plan of terrorist prosecution is predicated on a domestication of the shock triggered by the event, whose destabilizing effects must be absorbed and redeployed in the form of a “shock and awe” strategy of military retaliation in the East and of social repression in the West.

Immediately, the affective subtext that animates this disciplination of affect tilts our attention towards the mobilizing power of viscosity. The shock and awe pharmakon administered by the American establishment to exterminate the subversive contagion of terror condenses into a strategy of communication that produces knowledge on its enemies through “an active mobilization of the body’s immaterial capacities to think, feel and understand” (Terranova 2007: 133). Corey Creekmur (2010), for example, draws attention to the aural subtext of the war on terror. His study on “aural Orientalism” suggests that sounds like elegiac strings, military drumbeats and the *adhaan*, the Islamic call to prayer chanted by the muezzin, have become part of an immediate perceptual landscape made of cues that can influence our mood and social conduct. Behind this sensual solicitation, that brings us back to the anti-terrorist system of chromatic alert, is a strategy that suspends cognition, hijacking the body’s growth forces to provoke a reaction. It plays on its openness and reception to external stimuli to trigger a microevent that is then revirtualized in the infosphere via the porous membranes of cell phones, iPods,



portable computers etc. In a word, it operates on and through affective jolts and corporeal microevents which are then captured and reformulated as they enter the microscopic/systemic dimension of signification.

The eruption of affect into informational practices shows that the relationship between knowledge and power is shifting towards “intervention[s] on a public consciousness which senses, feels and perceives as it understands” (Terranova 2007, italics in the text). This means that affect-oriented approaches to contemporary communication processes privileging analyses of the asignifying dimensions of individuation, transmission and bodily activation connected to the theory of affect, provide the means to upgrade our understanding of the control dispositifs at work in an expanding media sphere which is irradiated and kept alive by growth factors such as passions. As Tiziana Terranova (2007) observes with regards to the Neo-Orientalism informing the post-9/11 logics of control and asymmetric warfare, conflict is today waged through a war machine that embeds the mobilizing forces of sensation into the epistemological realm of meaning-making and representation, in order to facilitate a passage between affective impulses and empirical facts. Fear, terror, alarm, anxiety or, conversely, elation, excitement, religious fervor and even apathy become the “signals without signification” (Massumi 2005a: 32) at work on a communicative plateau that symbiotically interlaces the microscopic and the systemic, affect and representation, the media sphere and a collective, responsive perceptual apparatus.

Applying such a reading to Mirzoeff’s observations on the “networked revolutions” in North Africa then helps to sense the ways in which the legacy of post-9/11 reverberates across the contemporary media landscape. In both instances, communication is always also an event transmission. It takes the form of an information warfare waged by way of idiosyncratic, non-linear dynamics made of delayed or false starts (when has the international action against Libya really begun?), moody updates (is the Egyptian army friend or foe of the population), inconsistent variations of alliances, irrational u-turns of news circulation (is the Fukushima event a Chernobyl-like emergency, or is it?), etc. As an event-rich decade separates us from 9/11, it remains to be seen how the entwining of emergence and control across the communicative spectrum will play and what we can learn from the eventual nature of information transmission.



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