Investigating Digitally Mediated Temporal Experience: From Empiricism to Ethics

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Introduction

Much recent scholarship in the field of media phenomenology has investigated the role of temporality in shaping our experience of digital media in everyday life, as well as the ethical and political ramifications that flow from it. Consistent with the central phenomenological tenet of locating the present as ontologically prior to any past origin, the idea is that in order to properly understand the texture of day-to-day digital navigation our focus should not be on discrete media texts or objects, nor indeed simply on the mode of attention with which we apprehend them, but on the way they are experienced first and foremost as presents into which we find ourselves repeatedly thrown. The central gambit here is that mundane presentness is ontologically constitutive of any higher order principles of ethics and politics, rather than a hindrance to their realization – a claim which derives from Heidegger's dissection of fallingness,[1] thrownness and inauthenticity towards the end of Division One of *Being and Time* (1962 [1927]). This allows us to cast new light on media practices that on the face of it look like degraded ways of encountering things, phenomena and especially people through digital media: distracted, ephemeral cultures of prodding, scrolling and swiping. Meanwhile, ethical interventions by the likes of Judith Butler (2005) and Louise Amoore (2020) have demonstrated that the opacity of how we came to find ourselves thrown into the present alongside other people and objects is anything but a hindrance to understanding the ethicopolitical implications of our inter-relationality with them – indeed it is the very foundation of them.

The aim of this article is to establish an empirical framework for scrutinizing the ethical dimensions of digitally mediated temporal experience. The traces of this experience are not paths from a past or causal origin (indeed according to the phenomenological framework the past is a temporality that emanates from the logically prior present), but traces of mobility experienced as always-already presentness, conceived as inescapable but elusive nowness. A corollary to this is that we should not think in terms of mapping an a priori digital media environment which is *then* experienced by users, because it is the experience of media through navigation (environments

experienced alongly, as Tim Ingold (2007) puts it; see Moores, 2014) which constitutes that environment. This has led media anthropologists (see Postill and Pink, 2012) to set aside looking for empirical evidence of experience in media cultures, communities or networks in favor of foregrounding routine, movement and sociality. Similarly, Kristian Møller Jørgensen's (2016) categories of media environmental affordances, representations and communications are conceived strictly as active and forward-facing – not as having emerged from a temporal or causal past. The article surveys these epistemological markers of digitally mediated temporal experience before further refining them into a framework that maps experience of *temporality, habituation* and *relationality* against the *projects, orientations* and *emplacements* that sustain them – acknowledging the influence of philosophers of ethics including Emmanuel Levinas (1996) and Simone de Beauvoir (2015 [1948]). As with all phenomenology going back to Edmund Husserl the notion of intentionality is key, but it is understood as something very much of the world rather than possessed (ideally) by the conscious subject or (nefariously) by an algorithm's code or a social media platform's business model. Empirically, this disabuses us of the need to look for the ultimate 'causes' of our experience of digital media, instead focusing on the experiential presentness from which everything else flows – consistent with the claim that temporalization unfolds with, and not prior to, its subjective experience.

Practice theory, in theory and practice: the habitual as origin

In the broadest terms, this methodological enterprise can be situated within the intellectual tradition of practice theory (see Ahva, 2017). Like any theory this has been inflected in diverse and sometimes contradictory ways, but the approach taken here cleaves more closely to Anthony Giddens (1976) and Ann Swidler (2001) than to Latourian actor network theory (2005). As Laura Ahva has it, this is practice theory concerned with "how the world becomes ordered and meaningful through shared and regular social activities" (2017: 1525). In this model practices can be defined after Theodor Schatzki as "socially recognized and embodied enactments, in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, things are described and the world is understood" (*ibid*.: 1526) – that is, there is no ghost in the (digital) machine that the researcher is dedicated to unmasking, but rather the observation of habituated practice as ontological origin the investigation of what flows from it. Diverging from Bourdieusian field analysis, practice theorists are as alive to the possibility of change as continuity in the media environments we inhabit, and continuity itself is seen not simply as a deterministic imposition of structural injustice and inequality but the very basis of shared cultures of meaning. We should absolutely probe that which shapes, nudges or explains our digital habits (Pedwell, 2017), incorporating everything from the corporeal reflexes with which we operate our smartphones to our regularized behavior

as online consumers and the affective rhythms of our social media use, but with a curiosity as to how it gives form and meaning to culture and not simply assuming the inflicting of symbolic violence.

On the relationality of habit: continuity and change

That practices are shared and that their enactment produces real effects in the social world means that a focus on relationality is key. To be sure, there are practices complicit in structural reproduction insofar as they give rise to the formation of dominant schemas that govern other practices (see especially Swidler, 2001), but they are often the least detectable insofar as they are taken for granted. The upside of this is that it frees the researcher from hunting for causality in practices that appear suspiciously programmatic, commercial or conformist. Instead, Ahva advises us simply to focus on whatever practices are easily identifiable, and then break them down into their primary elements of activity, materiality and reflexivity, before reconstructing them by identifying the causal, spatial, temporal and reflexive relations between them. This approach remains open to dissections of power relations consistent with political economy, but is also willing to be surprised by which practices anchor others and with what cascading implications. The same applies to that which sparks change in the mediated environments experienced in everyday life – for change they always do, frequently in unexpected ways beginning with seemingly innocuous innovations like the smartphone screen interface, haptic functionality or, before that, the humble SMS. It may be that a digital media culture is disrupted by an obvious technological innovation, corporate restructure or through the dedicated work of reformers armed with principles and objectives, but it can also start with a serendipitous falling out of alignment of the aforementioned primary elements as things slip and slide on the ground. As William James (2017 [1887]) observed and Swidler confirms empirically, profound changes in the way we do things flow as much from unthinking happenstance as conscious commitment.

In empirical terms, this means that there is less of an emphasis on reflexive interviews in practice theory approaches, and much more willingness to dig around in the stuff of everyday life. Ahva's 'activity' element breaks down straightforwardly into tasks, movements and positions; 'materiality' into things, bodies and places; and 'reflexivity' into criticism, appraisal and affect. Cross-referencing these generates a reliably sound sense of the resonances that underpin everyday experience, while opening up spatial, temporal and causal chains that allow for micro-analysis to tessellate with the meso- and macro-. There remains, however, the question of how that quotidian *temporal* experience is first and foremost one of *presentness*. David Ryfe (2022)

responds to this by introducing performance to the equation, taking into account the contingency and negotiation inherent to all practice (see especially Giddens, 1976; 1984). All manner of forces shape our practices, but that shaping can only take place insofar as practices are embodied and enacted by semi-autonomous agents equipped with a degree of spontaneity, inconsistency and guile. Practices are still understood as actions, doings and sayings linked as strips of activity that exhibit identifiable conventions, rules and strategies, and they exceed their individual practitioners across time and space. But nonetheless they are inextricable from those actors – as Bruno Latour puts it, the dance stops when the dancers stop moving, echoing Schatzki's (1996) observation that whatever states of sociality exist at a particular point in time are entirely contingent on the activities of agents facing temporally forward, and not simply being 'fed forward' inexorably from a status quo ante (see also Ryfe, 2017).

Orientations as practical bearings onto the world

The deathless debate about the degree to which social agents acting out behavioral templates or *orientations* that precede and outlast them are possessed of free will can be sidestepped here with a simple response: it depends. There is observable skill, creativity and artfulness at work, but it is unevenly distributed. Like Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) rules of the game, those most at home with the demands and stakes of a social setting do not just benefit from being able to strategize and outwit others, in addition they are able to tweak the rules of that game to the extent that they can reshape shared meanings and collective identities in their own image. This happens at the level of environments in which practices fall into durable arrangements in which social systems are sustained by regularized social practices that extend in time and space. Regularity is not sufficient, however: it is what Bourdieu (2000: 11) terms *illusio*, the embodied sense of shared orientation, understanding and purpose that keeps the show on the road. Embodiment happens when the practical knowledge that constitutes practices comes to be "naturalized, ordinary, legitimate, reasonable, sensible, appropriate, common sensical" (Ryfe, 2022: 222) – or, like Michel Foucault's governmentality, when it becomes intuitively convenient for things to be ordered in a particular way. This durability is what provides the material grounding for what Giddens (1984) describes as the recursive nature of social life, but there is nothing innocent about it, inseparable as it is from regimes of symbolic domination. What remains prescient here is that the rules governing practice are anything but exhaustive: they are generative and ever-emergent.

The sheer diversity of human behavior we observe as digital media researchers would seem to render the reliable transmission of cultural schemas remarkably precarious, but perhaps it is less than surprising: after all, rigidly aligned chains of practice are more susceptible to breakdown

and redundancy than dispositions that are unceasingly adaptable. Improvisation, mutation and game-playing can exhibit dazzling empirical diversity while remaining dependent on the 'outsourced' knowledge enacted in social practices – a more apt metaphor might be 'uploaded' to cloud storage underpinned by energy-hungry banks of data servers. Hence Omar Lizardo (2017) shines a light on the public symbols, discourses and institutions that underpin all social interactions, incorporating physical objects and settings, bodies, cultural forms and conversational scripts. This is very much of a piece with phenomenological perspectives in which it is a given that thrownness, that sense of constantly finding ourselves already amid an overwhelmingly replete reality demanding to be understood, entails scrabbling around for whatever resources are at hand to make sense of the world and our place in it. That these shared resources are not of the individuals that make use of them is neither here nor there; and the possibility, or indeed likelihood, that they are complicit and degraded is moot. In time they can be questioned, resisted and reformed, but as temporal origins they are unimpeachable – all that matters is that they form the basis of forward motion from the present which constitutes everyday experience.

The always-already temporal now: operationalizing presentness:

It is this stubborn insistence on forward-facing temporal presentness that lead ethnographers like John Postill and Sarah Pink (2011) to operationalize the empirical categories of routine, movement and sociality. The inevitability that this will foreground the mundane ephemera of everyday life can easily appear a flimsy epistemological scaffolding when one sees the kind of grasping for words and hastily sketched tableaux of the research encounter, but they argue the opposite: it is only by taking at face value the fleeting, scattered, inconsistent and sensory and affective that a deep, contextual and contingent understanding of a media environment is made possible, and by refusing the allure of imagined depth in causal and temporal origins. If any place is conceived as being in a constant state of becoming through practice and practical knowledge (Cresswell, 2002), then the ideal apprehension of it is as a culture that is discursively performed. John Law and John Urry (2004) have written about how poorly equipped the social sciences are to deal with these kinds of empirical material, but there is increasing promise in the emergent field of mobilities – or media mobilities in the context of the present discussion, which includes movements of people, artifacts, data, resources and so on. The point is not so much to document these movements across time – again, that would point to an untenable presumption of time flowing in a linear fashion acting as a backdrop to subjective experience – but to investigate how mobility itself is experienced, articulated *and produced* "across media ecologies as symbolic,

communicative and economic systems." (Keightley & Reading, 2014: 292). In short, the experience of a media environment is not secondary to it, but co-constitutive of it.

This means thinking of mobility-from-presentness not as a feature of media or social practice, but a process that emerges from their inter-relation. And it is not as slippery a concept as it sounds: they break it down empirically into temporality, spatiality and directionality (Mark Deuze (2012), by contrast, opts for connectivity, participation and acceleration). This allows them to tease out the mediation of relations between the temporal tenses in personal life as well as public culture – those outsourced resources of world-making, not just world-perceiving – and this in turn makes the structuring of social relations and identities comprehensible. There is no definitive recipe for achieving this, but Emily Keightley and Anna Reading turn to strikingly human binaries of connection/disconnection, embodiment/disembodiment and emplacement/displacement, before delving into how these mediate and are mediated by the political, social, economic and self-reflexive. Most perspicaciously, they propose the category of intermediacy, deriving ultimately from Deleuze and Guattari's (1988) assemblages, by which time is "produced through the interaction between media and social contexts of consumption, time can be produced through the interaction of multiple media in any given milieu, and time can be experienced through the negotiation between the various temporal logics of technologies and symbolic content" (Keightley, 2013: 68). Importantly, then, these spheres of intermediacy do not exist apart from insofar in which they are inhabited and acted. They are not just settings for temporal experience but are themselves brought into being through their performance. There is nothing to stop the researcher describing and interpreting the structures and logics that make up these 'zones', but the only way reliably to succeed in doing so is to analyze how they are navigated and negotiated.

The promise of understanding not just how temporality is experienced but how it is *made* has rightly been described as 'marvelous' (in the Aristotelian sense of the word) by John Durham Peters (2015): this is poiesis (Frosh, 2018), or how the world is made and not simply made comprehensible. It has been established that practices are above all embodied and oriented according to practical understanding; they are also materially mediated, and consist in Schatzki's model mostly of spheres of human activity – though, *pace* Friedrich Kittler, it is notoriously difficult to draw a clean line between the human and non-human. Practices are the context in which all the 'bodily properties' fundamental to the sustenance of social life are produced; these include competences and skills, but also affective experiences, physiological processes and physical structures, too. In analytic terms, everything boils down to that key relationship between the organization of social practices and the development and reproduction of social order. It makes sense that Schatzki resists reducing organization to regularity, as we have seen that

thoroughgoing irregularity in observed behavior is perfectly consistent with generative rules that are themselves firmly embedded and extensive in their influence. He opts instead for arrangements, which can be of people, things or artifacts; what remains crucial is that it is practices that govern both the shared meaning of arrangements, as well as the actions that make these arrangements. Without this double articulation of practice, social order simply would not be sustainable.

Projects and emplacements: place-making practices across time

The researcher's task then is to scoop into her net as wide as possible an array of non-regularized actions associated with a particular digital environment and look for underlying organizing principles. These may simply be rules that can be inferred – What would have to hold in order for this set of actions to manifest? – or they may be the outcomes of practical knowledge – What embodied understanding would be necessary? Evidently this is not the kind of work that can be done by asking participants about why they do what they do, but the what is more productive than the why in terms of reconstructing arrangements. Schatzki's model does allow for solicitations of felt experience insofar as they get at affect, or as he describes it, teleoaffectivity – that is, affect acknowledged in that context as meaningful. This then allows in theory for confirmation of how practices produce order by governing both the arrangement of activities and their meaningfulness. As with Laurent Thévenot's contribution to the same volume, Schatzki doesn't go so far as to ground observed activities in Bourdieusian dispositions or 'deeply' ingrained habits in the manner of John Dewey. The result is in broad terms a pivot away from techniques targeting beliefs, desires, emotions and purposes, towards the kind of embodied capacities that manifest as know-how or practical understanding.

The literature is replete with tales of researchers thus awkwardly getting their respondents to walk them through their use of an app, but there is real potential to reveal world-making practices in such *projects* and the *emplacements* they produce over time. In practice, following Schatzki doesn't entail refraining from asking research participants what they think about this or that digital artifact or function, but it does mean drawing a line at what they feel. Practical knowledge is not dumb embodiment, but in order to be operable must be supplemented by higher-order conceptualization including propositional knowledge and goals. This is consistent with Wittgenstein's stipulation that it is impossible for any kind of rule to govern activity in the absence of established ways of applying them. Following this dictum helpfully obviates against the search for hidden rules in algorithms that cause individuals to act one way of another; for all the talk of programmed sociality in the literature (Bucher, 2018) there are limits to the efficacy

of mechanistic determinism, not so much because social agents valiantly resist the dictates of the coding of the digital environments they inhabit, but because the production and reproduction of order requires much more than the existence of rules as such. It is entirely possible that Wittgenstein was on point in questioning whether the complexity of practical understanding could ever be adequately accounted for in words, but this lacuna is not evidence of an absence of shared and negotiated ways of knowing about rules without which those rules would be impotent.

Questioning the social order, causality and consciousness

There is considerable disagreement amongst practice theorists about whether practical understanding thus possesses causal power, though for the purposes of this article it makes little sense to seek out causes when it is what flows from presentness that matters. It is apposite to emphasize that it has no existence beyond its embodiment, and further that individuals have practical understanding only in their capacity as participants in social activities. The goal of any research encounter then is not to extract or abstract the participant from their digital milieux in order to get a better look at it or at them. Practical understanding consists of abilities that result from but also make possible participation in social activities; and given that social order is contingent upon practices emerging from embodied understanding, the human body has to remain front and center, even when empirical research interrogates the virtual. This can be liberating rather than a constraint, especially in that it reminds the practitioner that wherever one may stand on that question of causality, it is futile to try to pin down the rule-like formulations, in Lynch's (1993) words, that constitute something like a Bourdieusian logic of practice (Bourdieu, 1990).

It is difficult to overstate the significance of the claim that practices are fundamentally constitutive rather than derivative of causal origins. This extends to a category such as mind: while of course this can be shown to have biophysical sources, they depend ultimately on participation in social activities. Schatzki notes that acknowledging this transforms what we mean by knowledge, in that even scientific data are mediated by social interactivity and material arrangements. So again, devoting oneself to describing sequences and articulations of practices in epistemological terms is not a matter of collecting evidence of the expression of underlying rules, but producing knowledge of poiesis itself. In Schatzki's coinage, we shouldn't think of science as stockpiled representations but propositional knowledge that derives from practical understanding, ways of doing things and even material arrangements in the world. It has long held firm in phenomenological discourse that we only have ways of knowing, thinking and doing

to work with rather than Platonic first-principle knowledge, thought and action themselves. However, the important point here is that this doesn't represent a limitation on our access to purer epistemological categories but a recognition that it is only in media res that knowability is generated. Representational knowledge be damned: ethnographic methodology conducted in the thick of it is where the epistemological action is – it is knowledge, not a wild goose chase after knowledge of things-in-themselves leaving traces as they disappear remorselessly beyond our grasp.

The displacement of mind from the top of the epistemological hierarchy has some wide-ranging implications in practice. If we no longer conceive of intentionality as the expression of conscious interiority but something very much of the world, then Max Weber's (1946) characterization of ideas as 'switchmen' that determine tracks of action goes out the window (Swidler, 2001: 83). Investigating habit has always meant reconciling oneself to the fact that much of what people do has no conscious origin, let alone one that can be articulated. But there has always been a sneaking suspicion that this is because the ultimate 'causes' of behavioral patterns are wicked: think of the disciplinary power lurking behind Foucauldian discourse, or indeed the complicity that squats behind the curtain of Nietzschean moral genealogy. Practices understood as routine activities that stay for the most part determinedly unthought and automatic are as Bourdieu understood it both structured and structuring, but contra Bourdieu there can be no presumption of conservative reproduction, or as the embedding of injustice and inequality at ever more profound and unknowable levels. This need not go so far as de Certeau (1984) does in reading all manner of revolutionary potential in the way we cook or craft or play in everyday life, though it does mean that analyzing taken-for-granted senses of spatial awareness, or taste in food or music, can be read properly as evidence of world-making on the go rather than the internalization of ersatz ways of knowing and doing that mask the structural forces that 'really' shape why we like what we like and do what we do.

The affordances of practice as ethical foundations

Swidler's contribution to practice theory often boils down to the methodological insight that some practices anchor others – isolate a few key practical anchors and the interrelatedness of whole cultures of practice will reveal itself readily. But there is something more political in this that amounts to a riposte to those painting this theoretical perspective as merely descriptive and lacking teeth when it comes to the question of power. If the rules that make a social sphere are reproduced without individuals knowing them, but rather through those individuals "acting strategically in a world that presumes those rules", then surely this is evidence of deeply

embedded structures inscribed on Foucault's docile bodies? Not if it is the practice itself that reproduces the constitutive rule it embodies. A wonderfully revealing account of empirical research conducted by Elizabeth Armstrong (recounted in Swidler, 2001) shows how the proliferation of gender identities in 1960s-90s San Francisco emanated not by some deeper machinations of structural cogs leading for better or worse to the rise of identity politics as a distinct phase of or resistance to neoliberal patriarchy, but more exuberantly superficially from the logistical decision to label events in the cultural calendar after floats and contingents organized by and in small groups. This inference in turn echoes previous research by labor historian Richard Biernacki (1995), which found that the commodification of labor was not effected through the embedding of a distinct symbolic framework but through the mainstreaming of 'unobstructive practices' with obscure origins and which fly below the radar of awareness. It is perfectly possible that such practices, even as haphazard and contingent stabilizations of practical arrangements, can sustain systems of symbolic representation to which individuals have varying degrees of access (and facility of use), but the opposite does not hold. Changing how we think about labor does not necessarily change work practices, but changing work practices will reliably change how we think about work.

This is certainly consistent with the notion of practices as thrown into presents are logically prior to any symbolic representation of them. And Swidler suggests that profound symbolic transformation need not even be laborious to bring about: we think that habits are hard to change and reliant on dedicated repetition, but in fact simply the visual enactment of new patterns of behavior can spread the word that things have changed. We see this all the time of course in widespread public adoption of new digital habits such as selfies as others are discarded without a second thought, like the muscle memory used to operate a BlackBerry Messenger's keyboard or an early iPhone's home button. The point is that seeing habits change is not evidence that we have been 'reprogrammed', with all the implications of mental rewiring the term carries. We are creatures of habit and yet habits are themselves fluid (Highfield, 2017); when they morph this is likely to be accompanied by changing mental schemas and attitudes – including ethical ones. The notion of the project is precisely intended to capture the evolution of practices over time, with no stipulation that their origin or perception is unimpeachably ethical, and with no presumption as to what they may become over time. But while it is always possible to make sense in retrospect of the evolution of practices and symbolic systems – their emergence from distinct conditions of possibility, as Bourdieu had it – it is no more possible to conceive, design and implement behavioral changes that will reliably lead to predictable symbolic transformations, than it ever was in the Wittgensteinian tradition to infer the macroscopic logical conclusion of microscopic changes to language rules. It turns out that the design gurus and financial wizards of big tech have

less capacity to curate our inner mental lives and shared symbolic realms than we sometimes imagine, though the same applies to the better angels of digital policymaking, education and activism.

Affordance theory has moved on from thinking of affordances as behaviors that are enabled, encouraged or constrained by design or structural factors (Bucher & Helmond, 2018, in Light et al., 2018). In the first place we have seen that behaviors do not emerge out of environments, since those behaviors are entangled in the world-making of those environments themselves. And secondly, how we perceive the range of possible actions in relation to a technology is also shaped by social and material forces that are difficult to pin down. Affordances are always inclined to excess and unpredictability, as much as we are inclined to think of the platform era as an age of digital enclosure. Texting on phones was a design afterthought rather than the deliberate launch of a newly dominant form of social exchange; Google Glass was doomed not so much by its technical shortcomings but its associations with creepiness; swiping left and right on dating and hook-up apps probably became to be seen as less creepy rather faster than we would have predicted. None of which is to suggest that we give up on trying to explain social change and stasis in relation to technological transformation and continuity, still less on holding to account human and non-human agents wielding outsized influence over the shape of our everyday lives and the public realms we share. The explanations are there; Swidler simply demonstrates that they tend to the counter-intuitive more than prevailing social theory would forecast, and that it pays to be alive to what is revealed simply by identifying distinct articulations of practical, corporeal, reflexive, technological, social and material elements.

Foregrounding corporeality

Kristian Møller and Brady Robards (2019) take up the baton with their ethnographic investigation of ephemeral media mobilities, which is to say swipes and scrolls on screens. In empirical terms, the authors frame their research as a move away from focusing on social interactions in relation to material structures, and towards a simultaneous examination of the ways that digital artifacts are woven together in mobile practice, as well as the way they shape the forms of mobility that are either thinkable or just-doable. Maintaining this balance is a matter of homing in on tensions of mobility and stillness, potentials and actualizations and the place-making activities of both human and non-human actors. These are then mapped across dimensions of bodies/affect, media objects/environments, memory/narrative and the research encounter itself to identify clusters that may not otherwise have caught the researcher's attention. More than anything this approach lends heft to the kind of data-gathering that can

otherwise appear scattered and unstructured: methodologies of walkthroughs, go-alongs and scroll-backs. Following this framework can make the coding process seem a little formal, but only in passing: once all those apparently banal observations of objects, actions, processes and verbalizations have been put in one box or another (or several at once), the kinds of assemblages that emerge are on the whole intuitively meaningful. There is no expectation here that meaning will innocently emanate out of data *pace* grounded theory; rather that the expected themes of temporality, spatiality, the political and economic as well as subjective experience manifest in frequently surprising ways. Specifically, it prods the researcher to consider seriously the ethicopolitical affordances of practices that epitomize Heideggerian inauthenticity: robotic bodily movements, rote media habits, and activities with threadbare projections into the future.

There is a sense in the literature that relentless attention to the corporeal is, for better or worse, displacing a previously dominant dedication to the visual and textual. But Pink (2011) and others argue compellingly that the baby need not be thrown out with the bathwater. Images are after all very much part of the world in which we are continually propelling forwards in time, and thus entangled with world-making in action, rather than a doomed attachment to temporal origins and preservation. Productive use is made of Foucauldian event theory, in particular thinking of events not as points in time or space but intensities of things and activities. The focus then is on the "everyday and performative routes or narratives" (2011: 7) through which people, cameras and images are interwoven – along with the researcher too. So again the idea is to embrace the priority of the present, with an ethos of just diving in to these unfolding assemblages and not seeking to extract, isolate or conserve events and their constituents. There are borrowings too from Ingold's theorization of lines that conceives of perception as movement through emergent meshworks rather than apprehension of pre-existing environments. Producing, looking at and sharing images are not just things we do on the move: they are motion, active aspects of place-making along with all the other objects, subjects, processes and forces that photographic practices are entangled with.

'Scenic intelligibility' is the term Jørgensen (2016) gives to emplacement as the way we grasp the environments we continually find ourselves thrown into using whatever practices and artifacts are at hand. Translating this to a practicable methodology necessitates a focus on the material, visual, aural and especially kinetic aspects of activity. The go-along method illustrates this well, its mix of observed habitual behavior and improvised narration doing a better job of accessing the transcendent and reflexive aspects of everyday experience than either the retrospective interview or non-participant observation. As with Pink, theorizations from human geography are deployed to rethink digital places as, in the words of Shaun Moores, "experiential constructions

in which environments are practically appropriated via action and emotion" (2007: 5, in Jørgensen, 2016: 38). It is thus absolutely appropriate to elicit and interpret spoken accounts from research participants: there is no dismissal here of subjective articulation, but the encounter is designed to retain an element of the spontaneous and explorative, rather than the hopelessly overthought narratives ascribed to conventional research interviews. The go-along gets at the texture of digital navigation, meaning both the communicative fabric of a digital space, and what André Jansson (2013) calls the "feel of the weave", in a deliberate echo of Henri Lefebvre's processual framing of textures. The present-obsessed, forever-flung-forward-into character of thrownness as methodology can seem relentless and unforgiving, but it proceeds in the way we all do in thrownness, making use of whatever obscure, degraded, even complicit resources we can to make the world familiar, along with our place in it. We know from centuries of philosophies of time that the present cannot be made the object of consciousness, and there is no point trying to do so in a research encounter. The feel of the weave is instead all about patterns and rhythms, the "material traces and arrangements that embody the values assigned to particular routes" (Lefebvre, in Jansson, 2013: 143).

It is important to resist reifying spontaneity as though it is more authentic experience, closer to the thing itself than overthought mental reconstructions of it. Phenomenological approaches embrace the inauthentic as being as ontologically constitutive as any other mode of being in the world: the inauthentic is where we always start in the present, borrowing ersatz, second-hand symbolic shorthand to make sense of where and when we find ourselves. The value of spontaneity is instead what it tells us about practical knowledge as improvisation. There is nothing random about improvisation after all: musicians have to learn how to do it well, to the point that it operates at the level of hand-movement rather than in the mind. Bourdieu's (1977) habitus sometimes conjures images of a straitjacket, but just as important as its 'structured and structuring' dimensions is its endless adaptability, even in the most unfamiliar of environments. The same might be said of Erving Goffman's interaction rituals (1967), or Wittgenstein's language games (2010 [1963]), in both of which the scope for improvisation is essentially without limit. And lest this be cast as naively creative and weightless, it bears revisiting Butler's performativity, not misread as expressive performance of self but the incitement of prescribed subjectivity. Power is wielded upon, not by, the subject precisely when spontaneity is what is demanded in an encounter with an institution or authoritative other. The methods listed here do not aim to reveal digital navigators as virtuosos, but instead to show that practical knowledge does not consist of random clusters of learned habits. Practical knowledge comprises templates, scripts, muscle memory and outsourced heuristics, all of which are unevenly distributed and irredeemably ethical and political.

Conclusion: Mapping digitally mediated temporal experience

The claim made by this article to an empirical framework, for investigating the ethical dimensions of digitally mediated temporal experience boils down to categorizable evidence of rhythms, routes and states that manifest meaningfulness, social order and affordances over time. Foregrounding habit is not a matter of emphasizing the programmatic (or programmed) nature of human behavior, but rather the texture of the experience its patterns and flows sustain. Likewise shining a light on relationality is not just about cataloguing the extent to which practical knowledge is based on shared resources – it is just as much about symbolic economy, hierarchy and complicity as it is sociality and connectivity. By necessity our experience of the present draws on resources that are of the world and not immanent with us. But all temporal experience, from the intense to the merely affective or barely phatic, feels profoundly personal, and it is this sense that a phenomenological digital methodology must aim to apprehend and reconstruct. What then, makes practical knowledge personal, at a level that evades and transcends oral testimony? It is there in the *projects* we all just about construct and propel forward in time. As with de Beauvoir there is no pre-requisite of commitment or continuity or sustained attention in order for projects to engender higher-level affordances that resonate with ethics and normative values: to belabor the point expressed above, even the most distracted and inconsistent habits, those that look suspiciously superficial and derivative when taking the form of swiping and scrolling towards no particular end, are world-making. And if they are recognized as ontologically constitutive in the same manner that Heidegger characterizes gossip and boredom, then it is just possible that the affordances of effortlessly checking in on and navigating a social media app, or returning periodically to a game, or keeping up with news headlines on the fly, amount to something like ontological security (see also Lagerkvist, 2017).

It is also there in the *orientations* we assume and develop into a second skin, templates of improvisation that come to feel instinctive, expressive and internal in spite of their composition from without. We are rightly suspicious when dispositions towards the world become normalized, convenient, as this does not happen without the normalization of inequality, exclusion and violence. And yet orientations exceed agglomerations of acquired practical knowledge precisely because they feel like selves. And that means that the selves we manifest as digitally, from social media personas to Metaverse avatars and even algorithmically-constructed data profiles could well help us as researchers to understand and relay the experience of subjectivity in real-time. And it is there in *emplacement*, that sensuous interrelationship of body, mind and environment. As Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann had it, "the place in which I find

myself, my actual here, is the starting point for my orientation in space" (in Jørgensen, 2016: 42) – or in Sara Ahmed's words, emplacement is "the point from which the world unfolds: the here of the body and the where of its dwelling" (in Jørgensen, 2016: 42). Anything that bridges presence and movement has the capacity to illuminate not just habituation but inhabitation, what it means to be in that here from which the world begins. Needless to say this does not require geographical coordinates: any practices that register our hereness to ourselves, to others or to our devices and the codes that underpin them can get at the experience of emplacement as thrownness-into worlds in the making.

	TEMPORAL	HABITUAL	RELATIONAL
PROJECTS	BUSYNESS	CYCLING	RATIONALIZATION
	DISTRACTION	CHECKING IN	PROVISIONALITY
ORIENTATIONS	CURIOSITY	PRESENCING	HOMEOSTASIS
	BOREDOM	ENCOUNTERS	DISEQUILIBRIUM
EMPLACEMENTS	IDLENESS	AFFECTIVE	POTENTIALITY
	FLOW-STATE	EMOTIONAL	STAKES

Table 1: Mapping projects, orientations and emplacements across the temporal, habitual and relational

While by no means an exhaustive coding framework, Table 1 identifies the kind of practices, phenomena and experiences that stand as evidence for the temporal, habitual and relational dimensions of these projects, orientations and emplacements. A sense of *busyness* (see also Wajcman & Dodd, 2017), even if it is not particularly focused, can sustain an ongoing commitment to a project over time. This derives from previous research (Author, 2017) which found that a consistent level of attention to pretty much anything – and this can include feeling the need to keep up with what is happening on a social media platform – is capable of maintaining the kind of background hum that lends a project longevity, even if it enters frontstage only occasionally.

Distraction, next, can refer to two distinct kinds of digital experience. The first is distraction from an established commitment – the sense of being pulled away from it is enough to confirm its stability as a referent in one's temporal experience. But it also denotes the kind of committed distraction that Walter Benjamin (1996, see also Highmore 2010) defends, intentionally letting a space – artistic in his case, digital in ours, register tangentially or ambiently. Much has been written about the digital flaneur, but here it is possible to link the ideal of cultural flaneurism to the experience of willful distractedness and its manifestation in acquired practices of scrolling and swiping.

Curiosity, by distinction, pertains more to an orientation to the world than any specific project. Any orientation by definition is temporal – it is after all about the habituated recognition of meaningfulness of certain objects and phenomena, and heuristic responses to them. Again, curiosity does not have to be wide-eyed and sincere (see Hill, 2019); *pace* Heidegger, properly inauthentic curiosity is sufficient to propel attention from one object to the next – think deep-dives on YouTube – which is what discloses the world. This is an important phenomenological point to emphasize: it is entirely moot whether curiosity reveals the world as it is; its disclosure through world-making practices is the world as it is in its unfolding. An easily bored orientation performs a similar function: for Heidegger *boredom* is quintessentially inauthentic in its fallenness from Dasein, but it generates the fuel that over time embeds scattered, uncommitted practices which are as ontologically constitutive as any other. *Idleness* sits adjacent to boredom, and can refer to intentionally doing little more than killing time – though not standing still as such, for idleness is still motion – or it can be more akin to Heidegger's idle talk, the kind of frivolous chat – and here think practices of liking or reposting as corporeal reflexes – that nonetheless "pass the world along" (1963 [1927]: 212). There is a particular hereness to idleness in that its attentive object is less important than the subjective state it underpins. And this it shares with the *flow state*, where an apparently intensive focus on, say, a video game belies an experience which is thoroughly emplaced: it is not about the game after all, so much as the all-enveloping trance it can engender.

If temporal experiences identify what stabilizes them from thrown presents into the future, the habitual denotes the rhythms that sustain projects within the experience of everyday life. This can manifest as learned routes of *cycling* between digital objects – the websites one instinctively returns to daily or more frequently – or *checking in* on social media just to see what is going on (Frith, 2013). While we sometimes think of muscle memory navigation as ersatz, its rhythmicity creates that hum that can gird a project – again, this does not require consistency or conscious commitment over time. Acts of *presencing* more overtly push an acquired sense of self out there,

an orientation that might be conspicuously political, provocative or compassionate, or might subsist in little more than reminding the world that this is the kind of thing that interests me or that is the sort of digital place I like to hang out in. Digital *encounters* between known or unknown subjects bring us more firmly onto Goffman's patch, revealing as much about shared cultures of interaction rituals as subjective substance. But Goffman was blithely uninterested in the inner life, which reminds us that the experiencing of encountering others can have less to do with the two (or more) subjectivities involved and more with the dance that learned rhythms of encountering habituate.

If we were so minded we could make the same gambit regarding *affect* and *emotion*: whether they correlate authentically with some notional core subjectivity – say if they resonate with conscious commitments to humanitarianism and social justice – can be relevant, but it is essential to underline that learned affective responses to the news, for instance – feeling a bit sad about a faraway natural disaster, say, before moving swiftly on to something else – can just as readily disclose one's hereness in the world in its unfolding. The same goes for emotional responses that have a whiff of manufacturedness – lightning bolts of moral outrage on Twitter (Brock, 2020), for example. Insofar as they too have a rhythm to them, then even contrived moralizing can do the job of feeling not just seen but emplaced. The perceived inauthenticity of anger or pity or whatever matters less than the sense of positionality within an unfolding world that such emotions can afford.

Finally, it is those practices and experiences identified as relational that move us firmly onto ethical and political ground. Many though not all of these take more conscious forms – the spoken or written testimonies of research participants, overt value statements in social media posts and the like. *Rationalizations* explicitly reveal one's commitments to projects: This is important to me, or This is just the kind of person I am. We can if we choose taker these at face value, but it pays to bear in mind Bourdieu's dictum that a subjective motivation – It's just the kind of person I am – is likely to mask distinctly unindividuated markers of domination and dominatedness. *Provisionality* is another derivation from previous research that showed how little consistency or dedication is capable of sustaining projects. We are all aware of those who are steadfast in their values and commitments in online environments, but more broadly in researching everyday digital experience we find that most are satisfied with taking up positions in relation to the unfolding world that are for now, for the time being. Again echoing de Beauvoir, inconsistency is no barrier to evolving an ethical, political bearing towards the world.

Homeostasis and *disequilibrium* are two sides of the same coin: whether through confirmation or disruption, each affirms the subjective disposition that abides across time, that which we understand as the sense of self and our allegiances with similar others. These are also about habits, to be sure, but again there need be nothing more to the authentic self or its ethicopolitical commitments than habituation: it is precisely the rhythmic, choreographic navigation of the (digital) world that discloses it and ourselves. This is liberating for the researcher: it obviates the drive to find evidence of some inner substance of ethical values, when in fact they are all in the doing – and reflex, even Pavlovian, doing at that. Under emplacements fall those experiences which reveal our individual and collective responsibility for what happens next – as Peters (2001) argues, this is what constitutes us as publics more than anything else. So much of everyday life (and our interpretative coding of it) seems to be about regularity, what it takes to keep the whole show on the road, individually and collectively. But there is something vividly emplaced – again, in the sense of disclosing one's positionality in relation to an unfolding world – about experiences that register the *potentiality*, necessity even, of change across time. And most political of all, of course, is the apprehension that not only is there the potential of different futures in whose unfurling we are entangled, but there are *stakes*, individual and collective, in how things play out from here.

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[1] Fallingness, or the inauthentic lived experience of Dasein, is not a focus of the present article, but is introduced well in Lagerkvist, 2017.