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Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process. Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska. Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2012. h/bk 288pp. ISBN 978-0-262-01819-7. Price £22.95.

What if media are to be understood in terms of processes of mediation? And what if, even more provocatively, life itself is to be understood under these same terms? These are the interlocked arguments Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska present in their remarkable book *Life after New Media: Mediation as a Vital Process.* As the authors argue throughout the text, media are to be invented not merely observed, and the invention of media offers creative possibilities. Kember and Zylinska seek a shift of focus away from new media as a matter of distinct objects (smartphones, tablets, etc.) towards mediation as a process. In this regard, they explicitly attempt to overcome the conceptual binarisms riding media theory - for example, the distinction between technological determinism and social constructivism), a binarism that, Kember and Zylinska argue, has served to mask the fundamentally hybrid nature of media and technology (7). Kember and Zylinska seek to break with fixed categories such as "media" and "society." Media, the authors argue, are always already social and constantly partake in producing and enacting the social, not in terms of one "thing" affecting another "thing" but as always entangled and heterogeneous processes. Events and media cannot be set apart, as in terms of the latter representing the former; both are rather to be understood in co-productive and performative terms, where events are produced as they are performed through mediated processes. Mediation is a vital process that introduces potentials for new events, and indeed new forms of life. These processes of mediation include economic, social, cultural, psychological, and technical dimensions, yet cannot be divided into any such individual components (xv). Following from this equation of mediation with life processes, mediation covers a far wider terrain than any established understanding of "new media." Through a number of fascinating case studies, phenomena such as smart homes, cosmetic surgery, and finance are all approached through the lens of mediation, and the book indeed far surpasses the domain of media studies. The most problematic aspect of this rich text is then perhaps its title, as the emphasis on new media can here be misleading, indicating a far narrower focus than

the complex excursions into philosophical and cultural theory that the book actually encompasses.

Kember and Zylinska's theoretical position sets out from the work of Bergson and Derrida. What the authors take from these thinkers is a focus on mediating processes as both vital and differentiating. Mediation is fundamentally temporal and each step of the process introduces something new, a difference in kind from previous constructions. As such, mediation introduces ever-new potentials for life, for new performative events and connections. The mediation process is constantly ongoing, yet not in an uninterrupted manner. The flow of mediation will inevitably have to be cut through, over and over again, for anything to be stabilized and for any concrete product to emerge. The question that then is being raised becomes: what does it mean to cut well? (71). To cut means to make a decision, to take a stance that (momentarily) halts the process and gives some modality preference above others. A cut is inherently ethical, and what Kember and Zylinska advocate is an ethics of the cut, the responsible decision that intervenes in the flow of mediation. With their emphasis on the ethics of the cut, Kember and Zylinska part ways with the affirmative stance often found in recent uptakes of vital philosophy, as well as in the so-called affective turn. In particular, the authors step away from any celebration of "life" as a good in itself and rather argue for an understanding of life as a neutral force (186). Hence, life "is" but it is not necessarily a positive force to be celebrated or accommodated. In this respect, Kember and Zylinska argue for a critical attention towards the differences brought about by flows, desires and processes. Their call for creativity is hence coupled with a critical stance towards what's potentially being created. As an intervention, *Life after New Media* is a call for nuance and hesitation, a call for momentarily slowing down and carefully taking into consideration the differences potentially brought about by making a cut in this way or that. Herein lies the perhaps greatest contribution of this fine book, as it succeeds in a careful balancing act between actively engaging creative processes, while reflecting on where the paths created might lead us and which forms of life that are thus made possible.

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