# Transforming Images

## Screens, affect, futures

### Rebecca Coleman

ROUTLEDGE

# Transforming Images

Contemporary social and cultural life is increasingly organized around a logic of self-transformation, where changing the body is seen as key. *Transforming Images* examines how the future functions within this transformative logic to indicate the potential of a materially better time. The book explores the crucial role that images have in organizing an imperative of transformation and in making possible, or not, the materialization of a better future. Coleman asks the questions: which futures are appealing and to whom? How do images tap into and reproduce wider social and cultural processes of inequality?

Drawing on the recent 'turns' in social and cultural theory to affect and emotion and to understanding life in terms of vitality, intensity and 'liveness', the book develops a framework for understanding images as *felt and lived out*. Analysing different screens across popular culture – the screens of shopping, makeover television programmes, online dieting plans and government health campaigns – it traces how images of self-transformation bring the future into the present and affectively 'draw in' some bodies more than others.

*Transforming Images* will be of interest to students and scholars working in sociology, media studies, cultural studies and gender studies.

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For its focus on transformation and screens, and for lots of other things besides, this book is dedicated to Matt Moran.

# Introduction
Transformation, potential, futures

Across a wide range of sources and in a variety of different ways, transformation can be identified as a dominant theme in contemporary Western social and cultural life. At a macro level, social, economic and political life is seen as needing to change and update, and capitalism is thus argued to be an 'unstable and fluid affair which constantly evolves' (Thrift 2005: 1). At a micro level, governments call for citizens to improve not only their economic prospects but also their chances of being healthy and happy; businesses and organizations ask their staff to continually develop their skill-set; television programmes highlight the possibility of moving up the property ladder or becoming thinner, more attractive and/or self-confident. More than a dominant theme, then, this book examines the ways in which transformation is an *organizing feature* of contemporary social and cultural life so that there has become an *imperative of transformation*. This imperative of transformation, I argue, functions both at a socio-cultural level, as a necessity for change and progress, and at a bodily level, as an impulse for *self*-improvement. Thus, the emphasis in this book is on tracing how a transformative logic connects up – and also complicates – the realms of the 'macro', or socio-cultural, and the 'micro', or bodily. It is important to note, then, that my use of the term transformation is intended to signal that my attention is on *both* the socio-cultural *and* bodily.

The argument that is proposed here sees transformation as an *affective* condition of living in present times. Taking up and developing theories of affect and emotion, this book suggests that transformation is a vital, mobile, intense process that is *felt* and *lived out*. It seeks to account for both the affirmative and troubling aspects of transformation – for how some bodies in particular may affectively experience the imperative of transformation. In Britain and the West more widely, transformation can be seen as an everyday aspiration in ideas about upward (class) mobility in the form of home ownership, employment and professionalization, and personal health and happiness. As the chapters in the book explore, these ideas are circulated in and through popular culture; in the spread and intensification of consumer culture (Chapter 2), the popularity of makeover television programmes (Chapter 3) and the emphasis placed on weight and health (Chapters 4 and 5). Such aspirations can be understood in terms of what Lauren Berlant (2011) calls the fantasy of 'the good life', a fantasy that she

argues is 'fraying' (2011: 3).[1] This book is interested in the affective pull of the idea(l) or fantasy of the better life that is seemingly promised by transformation. As Berlant suggests, as the possibility of the good life at a social, cultural, economic and political level seems to become more distant, the fantasy as a 'collectively invested form of life' has 'become *more* fantasmatic' (2011: 11).

The specific focus of the book is on the role that *images* play in establishing and reproducing transformation as an organizing principle of daily life. It seeks to understand how images organize transformation through an attention to the *screen*. Drawing on recent work that demonstrates the centrality of screens to everyday life (Manovich 2002; Friedberg 1994, 2006; A. Wood 2007), the case study chapters of the book examine different screens in contemporary popular culture – the screens of shopping, makeover television, online dieting plans, government health campaigns – and attends to the similarities and differences of these screens through exploring the modes of looking, interaction and experience that they arrange and encourage. In particular, I argue that images of transformation function not only or so much as texts 'read' from a distance and capable of being deciphered for their ideological message, but as and through affect; they are felt in, through and as the body. Screens bring particular kinds of bodies to life. The concern of the book is therefore not only what images of transformation are *of*, but also what they *do*. How are images transformative?

The book pays attention to the *temporality* of images of transformation. It suggests that a key means through which the images at stake here are felt and experienced as affect(ive) is through their appeal to the future. That is, transformative images promise the possibility of materializing the body into something better. For example, shop changing-room mirrors indicate a body made better by the purchase of this or that item of clothing, makeover television shows the way to feel better by looking better, online dieting seems to assure a healthier, happier, thinner future and government health campaigns suggest the possibility of a better future via a 'change for life'. Examining these promises further, I develop a notion of the future as *potential* (Adkins 2008, 2009) and am concerned with teasing out how such an emphasis on anticipation or pre-emption of (Massumi 2005; Adams *et al.* 2009) the future works to 'pull in' some bodies rather than, or more than, others. Which futures are seen as desirable or necessary, and to whom? Is the fantasy of the good life 'fraying' for some social groups more than others? Or, conversely, might the need to transform in order to attempt to achieve a better future be intensified for some bodies? In what ways are these futures materialized? How is the future brought into the present through being *felt* as a necessity for transformation? In what ways does the future as potential, involve both changing a difficult present for the better and a temporal orientation around the present as a 'compromised condition […] of possibility' (Berlant 2006: 21)? What happens to the present when social and cultural life is organized around the future?

These questions are addressed in the case study chapters. The rest of this chapter sets out the theoretical context for asking these questions. It introduces the key themes of the book: the socio-cultural imperative of transformation and

a concern with temporality and the future, and sets up ideas that are developed in Chapter 1 on what I consider to be the centrality of affect to these processes. It places these themes in the context of recent sociological work on 'mobilities' (Urry 2007; Elliott and Urry 2010), 'vitality' (Fraser *et al.* 2005) and 'liveness' and intensity (Lash and Lury 2007), and unpacks the concept of transformation that is developed throughout the book; a logic that both promises potential and which casts some bodies as failing in needing, achieving and maintaining change. In particular, the chapter develops the notion of *potential* in terms of images of transformation and explores this through the relations between potential and *the virtual* and *the future*. The chapter then provides an outline of the rest of the book as a means to demonstrate how this theoretical framework is taken up and developed in the following chapters.

## Transforming the body: neo-liberalism, individualization and the experimental life

As the examples outlined at the beginning of the chapter indicate, contemporary life is concerned with and organized around a notion that change and transformation is crucial, at both an individual and socio-cultural level. While this is certainly a feature of current life, the significance of transformation is not a recent phenomenon. Mike Featherstone (2010), for example, discusses how transformation is 'one of the key tenets of Western modernity' (2010: 200), and can be traced to such seemingly different trends and traditions as Christianity, whereby one's life becomes spiritually and materially transformed through serving the world of God,[2] cultural, artistic and aesthetic movements such as Dandyism (which, in the late nineteenth century gave prominence to the notion of self-invention), and the myths of nationhood and national identity as inherently linked to the ideals of meritocracy and self-achievement (as with the American dream for example) (2010: 200–201). In the early to mid twentieth century, Featherstone argues, the expansion of consumer culture further circulated and consolidated the principle of transformation. In particular, the notion of 'the life lived in pursuit of new experiences, sensations and stylized appearance became influential' (2010: 201), and mass media reports of the lives of stars and celebrities from the entertainment, sports, business and political realms became widespread. As such, the cultivation of a fascinating and interesting life became seen as possible and desirable for everyone; '[t]he "look good, feel good" transformational logic of consumer culture is presented as within the reach of all' (2010: 202).

Importantly, for Featherstone the centrality of a transformational logic to consumer culture involves two interconnected trends: first, the new, transient or changing becomes prioritized over the conventional, permanent or enduring. For example, consumer culture is 'preoccupied with the "outgoing" values of "personality" (a charming and engaging appearance), in contrast to "character" (the virtues of consistency and steadfastness)' (2010: 201). Second, an emphasis is placed on *the body* as the locus of transformation. As Featherstone

suggests in an earlier, now classic, essay, consumer culture has developed 'a new relationship between the body and the self' (Featherstone 1991: 187) where 'the inner and outer body become conjoined; the prime purpose of the maintenance of the inner body becomes the enhancement of the appearance of the outer body' (1991: 171). While it is now commonplace to state that the body is of prime importance within contemporary (consumer) culture, the relationship between this preoccupation with the body and the importance of change and the new is worth discussing further, not least because a central focus of this book is to examine how images of transformation are felt and lived out through the body.

A number of social and cultural theorists have drawn attention to the increased interest given to the body, and to the ways in which changing the body is perhaps the primary means of transforming the self for the better. Feminist theory in particular has pointed out how this trend involves women's bodies especially. For example, developing Michel Foucault's (1977/1991) concept of the docile body in relation to a 'preoccupation with fat, diet and slenderness', Susan Bordo (1993/2003) argues that, for women, this preoccupation

> may function as one of the most powerful normalizing mechanisms of our century, insuring the production of self-monitoring and self-disciplining 'docile bodies' sensitive to any departure from social norms and habituated to self-improvement and self-transformation in the service of those norms.
>
> (2003: 186)

In a similar Foucauldian vein, Cressida J. Heyes (2007) develops Nikolas Rose's (2001) concept of the 'somatic individual' to explore the normalization of the ways in which 'the self is discovered or developed through transformations of the flesh' (Heyes 2007: 4). '[L]iving up to our inner truth', therefore, 'involves transforming the body to match' (2007: 5), and self-transformation for Heyes is thus a 'contradictory claim': it becomes

> an important aesthetic (in the deeper sense of ethically inflected, as well as appearance-oriented) project for every 'failed' body – that is for every body that does not adequately represent to the world its owner's genuine character, potential, or inner truth.
>
> (2007: 16)[3]

Every body should be able to accurately communicate true selfhood.

Of particular concern in this book are the ways in which the association of the self with the body and the constant requirement for change are processes that involve certain bodies. Some feminist analysers see these trends as symptomatic of 'post-feminist media culture' (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2005, 2008) where, as Sarah Banet-Weiser and Laura Portwood-Stacer (2006) put it, 'a "celebration" of the body, the pleasure of transformation, and individual empowerment function as a justification for a renewed objectification of female bodies' (2006: 257).

As I will go on to explore in the case study chapters, the imperative of transformation necessarily implies that the present is not good enough, and that, through changing the self/body, the future can be better. Such an imperative resonates with those bodies where the present is, in different ways, difficult or unbearable. Tracing how the need to change resonates with specific bodies – bodies that I argue are gendered, classed and raced – is a key aim of this book. It is clear then, that across popular culture 'the positive benefits of bodily transformative work are endlessly extolled' (Featherstone 2010: 200), and that social and cultural differences and inequalities are caught up in and (re)produced through this imperative of transformation. However, to return to the other point that Featherstone makes, what is involved in change and transformation being manifested through the body? Or, to put it another way, what is the relationship between this emphasis on the body and the concurrent emphasis on the new and changing?

While consumer culture is one context through which to understand the transformation of the body, it is also necessary to consider the imperative of transformation as part of the wider logics of capitalism. This is to attend to how, as an economic, social and cultural system, capitalism is itself transformative. One of the primary ways in which social theory has explored the relationship between capitalism and transformation is through the notion of neo-liberalism, a broad and wide-ranging theoretical framework that attempts to account for large-scale changes in the ways in which national and global economies are organized and how power, rule and governance are exercised in advanced liberal democracies. According to David Harvey (2007), neo-liberalism became dominant in the West in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the election of right-wing governments in the United States and the United Kingdom, and involved a large-scale transformation of global economics. For Harvey, neo-liberalism is:

> in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.
>
> (2007: 2)

No longer confined to Western countries, Harvey argues that neo-liberal economic practices of privatization and commodification extend beyond the state to permeate many, if not most, aspects of everyday life. As such, neo-liberalism has 'become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world' (2007: 3).

Of significance here, are the ways in which the relationship between neo-liberalism and power have been theorized. According to Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (1991/2010) who draw on Foucault's work, neo-liberalism involves power,

> not so much [as] a matter of imposing constraints upon citizens as of 'making up' citizens capable of bearing a kind of regulated freedom. Personal autonomy is not the antithesis of political power, but a key term in its exercise, the more so because most individuals are not merely the subjects of power but play a part in its operations.
>
> (2010: 272)

In neo-liberal societies, theorists argue, the individual becomes an active participant in bearing responsibility for social and cultural processes. Rose and Miller argue that this is a fundamental re-working of welfarism, where social problems are seen as the responsibility of the government. As indicated, neo-liberalism involves markets replacing regulation, regulation taking the form of economic entrepreneurship and 'active entrepreneurship [coming] to replace the passivity and dependency of responsible solidarity as individuals are encouraged to strive to optimize their own quality of life and that of their families' (2010: 296). Neo-liberalism thus 'entails a reorganization of programmes for the government of personal life' (2010: 298). The realm of personal life is established as autonomous from government, and individuals are seen as 'free' to 'make their own decisions, pursue their preferences and seek to maximize the quality of their lives' (2010: 298). This autonomy and freedom is manifested as 'the energetic pursuit of personal fulfillment and the incessant calculations that are to enable this to be achieved' (2010: 298, references omitted). Transformation is thus a key means through which the 'making up' of citizens works.

A central theme that has been identified within contemporary neo-liberal practices is thus of *individualization*: indeed, Ulrich Beck and Elizabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argue that individualization is *the* decisive feature of the modern world. Individualization for these authors refers to, on the one hand, the 'disintegration of previously existing social forms – for example, the increasing fragility of such categories as class and social status, gender roles, family, neighbourhood etc.'[4] and, on the other hand, the 'new demands, controls and constraints [that] are being imposed on individuals' (2002: 2), such as those pointed out by Rose and Miller. These social changes emerge out of a more general condition of reflexive modernization, in which, as Beck describes elsewhere, 'the more societies are modernized, the more agents (subjects) acquire the ability to reflect on the social conditions of their existence and to change them accordingly' (Beck *et al.* 1994: 174). In reflexive modernization, there is a new relationship between the individual and the social where 'what the social is and does has to be involved with individual decisions' (Beck 1992: 90; cited in Adkins 2002: 15). In this context, individualization is an attempt to account for the form that the relationship between the individual and the social takes in this 'de-traditionalized' reflexive world.

For Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, the emphasis placed on the individual does not mean that he or she is acting outside of social structures and constraints as 'individualization is a social condition which is not arrived at by a free decision of individuals' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 4). Although they do not

explicitly draw on Foucault, there are echoes of Rose and Miller's argument in Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's statements that individualization processes 'demand an active contribution by individuals' and that individualization is,

> a compulsion, albeit a paradoxical one, to create, to stage manage, not only one's own biography but the bonds and networks surrounding it and to do this amid changing preferences and at successive stages of life, while constantly adapting to the conditions of the labour market, the education system, the welfare state and so on.
>
> (2002: 4)

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's interest in the compulsion for individuals to create and manage their own biographies, seeks to account for the prevalence of what they term an 'ethic of individual self-fulfillment and achievement' which 'unfold[s] in accordance with a schematic pattern' (2002: 22). They argue that the 'choosing, deciding, shaping human being who aspires to be the author of his or her own life, the creator of an individual identity, is the central character of our time' (2002: 22–23) and outline how this 'life of one's own' is socially significant in a number of different ways.[5] Of particular interest to the argument being proposed in this book, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim pinpoint how the neo-liberal enforcement of atomization (2002: 24) – which requires individuals to construct experimental and flexible life biographies – functions to mask the standardization of life; if all lives must be created, experimentally and flexibly, then these lives are not 'one's own' but are socially structured and determined. However, neo-liberal policies and practices collapse responsibility of the quality of individuals' lives from the state to the individual – '[y]our own life – your own failure' (2002: 24) – and the notion emerges that '[p]eople are better adapted to the future than are social institutions and their representatives' (2002: 28). Put simply, if an individual's life biography is not successful, it is up to that individual to experiment again, to construct another life, to realize their own potential.

   The emphasis placed on the experimental individual in both theory and practice indicates for Elaine Swan (2010) that it is important to consider not only the socio-cultural implications of the dominance of a logic of transformation but also what self-transformation might mean for those who actively participate in it. Drawing on her own experience as a client and practitioner in personal development, Swan's study unpacks the understandings of 'self-work' – 'self-exploration, self-expression, self-reflection, self-improvement and experimentation with appearance, capacities, behaviours, emotions and thinking' (2010: 1) – that personal development workers[6] see as central to their practice. In the context of discussing the notion of the self and its transformation, for example, Swan argues that personal development workers work with different ideas of what the self is and can become, and of what is involved in the transformation of the self: an authentic self where 'transformation is a form of unmasking a self, which has some unity over time' (2010: 141); a 'make-over'

model of transformation where 'the gap between the "self that is" and the "self to be", seen to be of great distance, can be instantly closed' through the expertise of the practitioner (2010: 154); a 'quick fix' model where 'some aspect of the self is improved or replaced so that the small transformation sets in motion larger transformations that are needed by the self to move closer to its ideal' (2010: 154–155) and; the experimental transformation where 'changes are seen to be achieved through a series of trail and error whereby the client tries out different therapeutic techniques and practices of the self and evaluates their success' (2010: 155).

There is clearly much more to be taken from the different modes of transformation that Swan identifies, but what is particularly interesting in my focus here is the versions of temporality that they imply. Swan comments on the centrality of temporality to what she and others (for example Rose 1989, 1996; Giddens 1991, 1992) have termed, therapeutic culture and the psychologization of the self. The past, for example, is seen as potentially problematic within therapeutic cultures but is capable of being transformed through techniques which seek to reduce its effect on and the possibility of it 'hanging around in the present' (Swan 2010: 164). For the practitioners in Swan's study, this might involve 'unhooking' the present from the past (2010: 164) and recognizing that the present involves choosing ways in which to interpret the past (by learning from it for instance) (2010: 165). What is of prime significance to the need or desire to transform – and what is in focus in this book – is the possibility of changing the future; the future is that which involves a self different to and better than the self in the past and present. In analysing the notions of the future that personal development practitioners work with, Swan critiques Anthony Gidden's (1991) argument that 'an attempt to shape future selves and future lives through setting up a particular chain of causality located in the self, in which the future unfurls from particular actions in the present' is a 'colonization of the future' (Swan 2010: 161), by suggesting that it rests upon and implies a uni-directional and linear model of time. Instead, Swan argues, for personal development practitioners, the future is not so much detached from the present – that which is yet to be – but is 'innate, contained in the present self' (2010: 168). The future is a 'vantage point' (2010: 168), 'sought out in order to illuminate the present' and 'to offer different perspectives with which to view oneself. The popular notion of the self as the accumulation of the past, and development as a uni-directional linear journey is complicated […] here in that time can be reversed' (2010: 167). As such, and as I will discuss further below, the future is a kind of *potential* that exists within the present.

The theories of individualization, reflexive modernization and of the construction of an experimental life biography have been influential in social and cultural theory in terms of the attention that they give to large-scale social change and to the increased prominence of the individual within these changes. However, these theories have also been critiqued for over-emphasizing the disintegration of social categories of class and gender, for instance, and the, albeit restricted, agency of the individual to be the author of their life (Swan's research

draws on this work). Angela McRobbie (2008), for example, sees theories of individualization feeding directly into post-feminism which 'airbrushe[s] out of existence' the 'enduring inequalities which still mark out the relations between men and women' (2008: 19). Arguing that '[s]elf-help guides, personal advisors, lifestyle coaches and gurus and all sorts of self-improvement TV programmes provide the cultural means by which individualization operates as a social process' (2008: 19), McRobbie points to how (young) women in particular embody the individual who

> must now choose the kind of life they want to live. Girls must have a life-plan. They must become more reflexive in regard to every aspect of their lives, from making the right choice in marriage, to taking responsibility for their own working lives and not being dependent on a job for life or on the stable and reliable operations of a large scale bureaucracy.
>
> (2008: 19)

The choices that young women (must) make then, operate within 'a modality of constraint. The individual is compelled to be the kind of subject who can make the right choices' and such 'choices' 'are productive of new realms of injury and injustice' (2008: 19).

Discussing Beck's individualization thesis, Beverley Skeggs (2004) has also questioned the attribution of class to a traditional, ascriptive identity rather than a modern identity. Drawing on Mike Savage's (2000) point that in understanding class in this way, Beck has fundamentally misconceived the classed relationships between the individual and the social, she argues that what Beck[7] has 'read as the decline of class cultures and the rise of individualization [...] would be better understood as the shift from working-class to middle-class modes of individualization' (Skeggs 2004: 52). Such a shift is especially the case with what Savage has argued is the 'subtle reworking of the relationship between class, masculinity and the individual, enabling the emergence of a new form of self-developmental individualization, premised on particular kinds of middle-class employment relations, defining a new mode of individual identity' (2004: 52). As such, Beck's and Beck and Beck Gernsheim's theory of individualization and the 'free' agent who is able to construct their own experimental life assumes not a neutral individual, as it may seem, but rather a classed individual who has 'access to the resources by which the self can be known, assessed and narrated' (2004: 53). Furthermore, and drawing again on Savage, Skeggs argues that the theory of individualization performs a number of 'rhetorical ploys, designed to convince by claiming plausibility and having more "commonsense" than other accounts; accounts that resonate with middle-class experience' (2004: 53).[8] In Chapters 3 and 5 I pay specific attention to the ways in which experiences which resonate with middle-classness can come to dominate images of transformation and how an understanding of images as felt and lived out through their affective appeal may help to explore the immanent and empirical experience of those bodies that are caught up in the imperative of transformation.

In terms of class and gender then, theories of individualization, reflexive modernization and the experimental life, have been challenged. Indeed, as Lisa Adkins' (2002) detailed and wide-ranging analysis of these theories suggests, they tend to assume an implicit middle-class masculine self/body which has the access and ability to construct and experiment with their life biography. As such, the detraditionalization thesis proposed by writers such as Beck and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 'fails to register that such mobility and reflexivity is not transgressive, but involves a new arrangement of gender, one which […] concerns positions of flexibility and immanence in relation to cultural style.' (2002: 80). For example, in the context of work, which is understood by academics and business professionals to be increasingly 'feminized', Adkins points out that the mobility of workers is unequally distributed. That is, while men may take up and perform the aesthetics of femininity, 'women professional workers not only find it difficult to "take on" masculinity, but performances of masculine aesthetics often have negative workplace consequences' (2002: 75). Moreover, as femininity becomes a style that men can be seen to perform,

> rather than a set of workplace skills, strategies or performances, femininity is made immanent for […] professional women workers. […] [F]emininity may now be a key aesthetic resource, […] [b]ut if performances of femininity *by women* at work are not recognized as performances, they will not be recognized as styles which are made up, deployed, and exchangeable as workplace resources. That is, they will not be recognized as concerning the take-up of a reflexive stance towards gender.
>
> (2002: 79)

It is, then, not so much that in neo-liberal societies gender as a category, identity and mode of embodiment is disintegrating in importance, but that gender is *re-organized*; the contemporary emphasis on mobility, flexibility and reflexivity necessarily 'entail[s] new forms of power' (Adkins 2002: 80; see also Swan 2008; Swan and Fox 2009). Indeed, Adkins suggests that 'a politics may well need to be developed around immanent and flexible subject positions' (2002: 80).

I will return to the issue of how gender and class are re-organized in terms of flexibility, mobility, immanence and temporality later in the book through an analysis of the affectivity of images. What these arguments mean for a discussion of the imperative of transformation is that, as Adkins puts it, 'there may be certain embodied and pre-reflexive aspects of identity which are less amenable to self-transformation' (2002: 45). In terms of the creation and management of a reflexive biography then, the experimental life 'needs to be recognized as a technique central to the constitution of gender and sexuality, post social structure or post society. As Ahmed has argued, experimentation reconstitutes differences differently' (2002: 128, references omitted). A key way in which I examine how a bodily and socio-cultural imperative of transformation is involved in the re-organization and re-configuration of difference is through a consideration of how power might be working today. In order to

begin to unpack the contemporary workings of power, in the next section I first turn to explore the ways in which other sets of social and cultural theory have sought to understand change.

## Theorizing change: mobility, intensity and power

Debates around neo-liberalism, individualization and the experimental life have been a principal way in which recent social and cultural theory have approached and dealt with the dominance of transformation across many areas of contemporary life. Of particular importance for this book is their concern with how power works through the 'making up' of bodies/selves and how this making up is compulsive. Moreover, critiques of theories of individualization draw attention to how the compulsion for transformation is organized differently for some: an issue that is developed further in this book. At the same time, and while not taking transformation as a central focus, social and cultural theory has also drawn attention to the patterns and processes of change, movement and flow in everyday life. What these theories suggest is that social and cultural life is itself transformational, that is, always in process, always moving and changing. These theories are helpful, I suggest, for understanding how contemporary capitalism functions through a logic of change and becoming different and, as discussed in Chapter 1, for thinking through the *affective* dimension of a socio-cultural and bodily imperative of transformation.

The relatively recent emergence of the sociology of mobilities seeks to account for how

> mobilities encompass […] both the large-scale movement of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life. Issues of movement, of too little movement or too much or of the wrong sort or at the wrong time, are central to many lives, organizations and governments.
>
> (Hannam *et al*. 2006: 1)

Rather than conceiving the social in terms of the problem of order – for example, how can society be (made to be) more cohesive? – the sociology of mobilities is interested in how the everyday is increasingly characterized by movement and flow, and how these movements create a ' "networked" patterning of economic and social life, even for those who have not moved' (2006: 2). Such an approach requires attention be paid, not only to those in the wealthy, privileged north and/or west of the world who are able to move for work and pleasure, but also to those for whom mobility is not an option, or who may be made to move to find work, avoid climate change or escape persecution, for example. It is necessary to 'track […] the power and politics of discourses and  practices of mobility in both creating movement and stasis' (2006: 3–4, references omitted).

This 'tracking' has involved a wide range of emphases; specific modes of travel (Featherstone *et al.* 2005; Knowles *et al.* 2008; Adey 2010), tourism (Sheller and Urry 2004; Burns and Novelli 2008), consumption (Urry 1995; Lury 1997), space and the urban (Graham 2001; Cronin 2008a, 2008b; Cresswell and Merriman 2011) and methodology (Buscher *et al.* 2010), for example. In *Mobile Lives*, Anthony Elliott and John Urry (2010) discuss mobilities in terms of the relationship between technology and affect/emotion. Taking 'Sandra', 'a composite of two case studies' (2010: 164, n.2), as an example, Elliott and Urry explore the ways in which a 'digital lifestyle of mobile communications' enables a sense of proximity and intimacy across space (2010: 26). Sandra is a 'high-profile advertising executive', married with three young children, and working in London during the week and returning to the family home in Leeds at the weekend (2010: 25). On the move a lot of the time and away from her family, Elliott and Urry discuss how Sandra maintains a feeling of closeness with her children, in particular, through music selected and downloaded on different digital technologies (computer, i-Pod, i-Phone) and through various technologies in her London flat (landline phone, fax, email, Skype) which act as an 'open communication line' to the family in Leeds. Sandra also spends a great deal of time cataloguing thousands of family photographs stored on Google Picasa and editing home-movies on Apple i-Movie.

There is much to be taken from this case study, including the gendered, classed and raced aspects of Sandra's access to a digital lifestyle. However, of interest to the discussion of mobility as a dominant socio-cultural characteristic in contemporary developed capitalism are the ways in which 'mobile lives are fashioned and transformed through various technological forms – virtualities, electronic discourse – in the emotional connections people develop with themselves, others and the wider world' (2010: 28). Digital technologies are integral to making the mobile lives of the privileged successful, not least because they

> facilitate the mobilization of feelings and affect, memories and desires, dreams and anxieties. What is at stake in the deployment of communications technologies in mobile lives [...] is not simply an increased digitization of social relationships, but a broad and extensive change in how emotions are contained (stored, deposited, retrieved) and thus a restructuring of identity more generally.
>
> (2010: 28)

For example, as well as feeling that digital communications technologies bring her emotionally closer to her family, Elliott and Urry also discuss how Sandra points to feeling anxious at the amount of time she spends 'immersed' in family photographs and films, which she describes as perhaps 'too obsessive' (Sandra in Elliott and Urry 2010: 36). Elliott and Urry discuss how Sandra reports feeling

> considerable levels of guilt over being away from the family so regularly. She also seems aware of the disquieting scenario of loss more generally. But

Sandra's reflexive level of self-awareness also seems to falter in this connection. She feels not on 'solid ground' when it comes to understanding the countless hours she spends organizing their electronic photo library, or editing family videos. Because she does not quite understand the emotional prompts for these activities, she says that she feels worried.

(2010: 36)

What I suggest is significant from this quotation is the connection between mobility, technology, affect and the body. In this case, the technologies that an apparently successful mobile life require, create feelings of guilt, worry and anxiety in the body as well as of family bonds. Mobile technologies are both 'intoxicating' and 'threatening' (2010: 41). The point here, is that tracing the patterns of mobility requires attention to be paid to the body and to the affects that capitalism seems to create. As Nigel Thrift puts it, '[c]apitalism has a kind of crazy vitality. […] It appeals to gut feelings. It gets involved in all kinds of extravagant symbioses' (Thrift 2005: 1).

For Thrift, contemporary capitalism has taken on a life of its own. It is not only an overarching, repressive system but is also a performative, perpetually unfinished experiment (2005: 3). Such an understanding of capitalism does not mean that only the 'thrills and spills' (2005: 3) – the new and latest – require attention. As I have discussed above, change and transformation might very well not do away with old differences but organize them differently, and 'the routine, even boring' are key to the performativity of capitalism in establishing its 'stable repetition' (2005: 3). However, an understanding of capitalism as vital, as processual, as unfinished, *does* require an attention to the generative, the inventive and the intensive. For Thrift, who is interested in the 'cultural circuit' of capitalism – 'business schools, management consultants, management gurus and the media' (2005: 6) – capitalism has in part become 'a theoretical enterprise in which *various essentially virtual notions* (network, the knowledge economy, the new economy, community of practice) *are able to take on flesh as, increasingly, the world is made in these notions' likeness*' (2005: 6, my emphasis). One consequence, or, better, an integral part of this circuit, is an emphasis on the body, where '[m]uch of modern capitalism is concerned […] with producing new kinds of managerial and worker bodies that are *constantly attentive, constantly attuned to the vagaries of the event, through an emphasis on the ludic and affective*' (2005: 6, my emphasis). Capitalism therefore now 'has the power to make its theories and descriptions of the world come alive in new built form, new machines and new bodies' (2005: 11).

While Thrift's focus is on business and management, the economy and the bodies of workers, his explanation of capitalism here introduces and points to some of the concepts that are pivotal to the ways in which this book tries to account for both the transformative character of images and for how images of transformation are felt and lived out. Two concepts are of particular significance here: vitalism and virtuality. I return to the concept of the virtual below in my discussion of temporality and the future, and develop it further in

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