

Flowing Forms, Pt. 1: Real Bodies

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Scholarly attention to alternative media is increasingly important as new spaces and networks of production, distribution, and interaction foster diffuse and diverse connections. Vice Media's global and intermedial expansion hinges on the company's history of embracing alternative youth cultures and pursuing transgressive or taboo topics, thereby setting the stage for a deeper conversation regarding the ways in which "new" media industries and performances of difference become increasingly intertwined. Vice Media's contradictory alliances to both corporate media power and representative diversity suggest that alternative media can also be mobilized to extract market value from radical embodiments of life otherwise. As a global media "challenger brand" that traffics in visceral affects, Vice Media suggests that "new" mediations of difference can, on the one hand, offer certain possibilities in terms of change or resistance, and on the other, ultimately manage or re-work certain bodies into the folds of capitalist production and biopolitical power.

Thus, we need to pause to unpack new media formations or assemblages like Vice Media, as well as the bodies, industries, and infrastructures that support the underlying affective economies of the digital video industry more broadly. Cris Ip, writing for the *Columbia Journalism Review*, suggests that Vice's appeal is in part due to its "realistic" aesthetics within a digital video ecology: "video that appears to be real hits the viewers viscerally, cuts through the noise of the internet, and shares well on social media." If we follow this trajectory of logics, Vice's aesthetic appeal is that, to young people, circulations of videos that cut them "viscerally" and read as "genuine" provide an opening to an alternative sense of presence and geography than other mediations of the global. If placed in the context of (tele)visual news, Vice challenges and unravels the "realness" engendered by current state and institutionally recognized sources of video production. While this signals a refusal of both the ephemerality and disembodied views of the cable television news story and the heavy regulation of image circulation engendered by the deeply entangled relationship between Western militaries and media, it does so by turning towards a long tradition of highly aestheticized war and conflict image circulation. In other words, beneath even these surface challenges to a monolithic "culture industry" of global image and video production lies a number of other questions: what, precisely, is a constellation of production like Vice resisting? What does it mean to at once characterize an alternative production and distribution network as a "challenge," or an articulation of resistance, and as a "brand"? What is a "brand of resistance"? And what do the politics of viscosity and affect perform in this alternative articulation of Vice's "different" world?

It is easy to be dismissive of Vice Media's exoticizing tendencies: in continuously lauding its "difference," Vice Media in fact depends on the existence of, and longs for the same terms of recognition as, the supposed mainstream institutions it resists; a fact

that is evidenced in the corporation's deep imbrication with the monolithic sources of capital it shallowly and rather performatively criticizes. Yet its global diffusion into a number of media markets demands a more flexible and focused examination of how and in what ways Vice insinuates itself into broader global media ecosystems, as well as the consequences of its global circulations. There now exists a market for increasingly digitized and "independent" forms of humanitarian and global lifestyle video production, primarily shot in places of war and/or disaster. While the setting is not new to televisual forms by any means, the distance presented in these often short-form documentaries has: "immersive" video is a lucrative commodity for hip, branded philanthropy, while simultaneously standing in as the new model for innovative news and short-form documentary (typically also branded content). This mediated closeness is only growing more technologized as major new media companies invest increasingly in VR storytelling formats, particularly on the cutting edge of the journalism industries. Considering the arguably affective turn in such coverage, which works to further draw bodies immersively into mediated environments, unpacking how bodies and affective labor are exploited for capital profit on both sides of new media networks becomes increasingly vital to the field.