

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

States of Matter, the Media, and Stormy Daniels

Robin Grearson · Wednesday, June 6th, 2018

1. Force For Good (and Profit)

I never meant to consume so much news. News, The News, The Media, lost its place as a Thing Over There that I could pick up or set aside according to my own priorities and became a firehose in 2016, a weapon to bombard the public and whose velocity and pressure increased aggressively against that public. I have begun wondering about the science of “the media,” and it has been helpful to shift my perceptions and consider the dimensions of information, to find metaphors and create mental images of news, comparisons to things that have shape and volume, even to states of matter.

News once felt solid, fixed in shape and volume. The delivery of information itself could perhaps be considered as a wave, in terms of amplitude or frequency. But News (and advertising) were previously wrapped in formal containers—television, websites, newspapers. This gave the impression that News Stories were solid, discrete things, and publications also relied on the form of those containers, like the size of a headline or the length of a story. It’s not just Facebook’s news feed; these signifiers, these containers have changed completely. The relative position and size of a headline on a printed page is not just meaningless, but is very easy to imitate dishonestly, to misinform.

It’s likely my increasing media consumption since the election that made it easier to visualize information as existing as a state of matter exists, a solid that has changed its state to liquid—fixed in volume but not shape—or to gas—not fixed in volume or shape but capable of expanding, “news” surrounding me and existing not as foreground or background or object but an atmosphere instead.

It’s worth remembering about the laws of physics that liquids can be converted to gases by raising the temperature or changing the pressure (force) applied.

The temperature has been increasing and force has been applied to media as a thing until it has broken apart and changed into a new thing that resembles atmosphere. In this new atmosphere, stories are no longer contained like water in a glass. Narratives are born or invented as memes, “facts” allegedly their mooring. But within a landscape, where here and there have collapsed, we are all actors, combatants, picking up memes and hurling them at each other into blended social media spaces that both obey and do not seem to obey gravity.

I know I am stumbling in the dark, searching for crude descriptions of what I have felt and observed but do not understand about the flow of news, of how “news” did not just change its shape in 2016; under its constant pressure, the news has perhaps also changed us. Quantum physicists or designers of meme warfare likely know well the rules of information-as-physical thing, but I do not.

But as I consider media-as-energy, I also wonder how it fits the law of conservation of energy, the law which states that energy cannot be created or destroyed, it can only change form. Translated back into personal terms, there’s an analog here for the way emotion acts as energy. If I’m upset with someone, I can swallow the anger or vent the anger, but, once angry, the only way to “release” the anger is to convert it to something else—physical exertion, like taking a walk (or yelling, throwing things); dissipation over time; actively processing thoughts by writing in a journal.

There is no denying the President as a source of a particular energy. Combative, conflict-generating, anger-provoking, belligerent. A change agent. Whatever you label the spark of his utterances, they are force, they introduce pressure. A pressure that seeks to change the state of things into something else. I will say that again: His utterances introduce pressure into a system that seeks to change the state of things into something else.



By way of his insistence on communicating directly on social media and at rallies where two-way conversation or inquiry is impossible, the mechanism and structure of the system of reporters and analysts and commentators functions as a one-way megaphone. And there is no way around it. Because of long-established industry conventions, it hardly matters whether a broadcaster is reluctant or enthusiastic to spread the message, it will spread—it is From The President. In this way, as if pouring liquid into a fan, this energy, this force, circulates like spatter through the system over and over and over. A fire he is constantly stoking. On social media, we are all oxygen.

We are all of us then struck like tuning forks, vibrating wildly at our different pitches. Once the energy sent has been received, it has to be processed, released, rejected, internalized, deflected. For me this energy usually becomes gasps and yelps and some indignant Tweet-snark. This, too, the nature of ourselves as receivers, doing so much receiving, is changing us.

My outrage is captured, it returns to the media system and takes the form of cash. The experience of this agitation may feel pointless to me, but the operant-conditioning-at-variable-intervals-esque Tweeting is not futile within the space of “Internet.” It seems the President manufactures agitation. Once generated, this agitation becomes measurable, purposeful, wealth-creating, and can be sold and resold. Unlike analog earth, the Internet is a nearly perfect environment where everything expressed is captured as though it is a *closed* system—recycled and transformed into capital somewhere else. It feels open and endless but the information is locked as tightly as a terrarium.

Transforming and transformed, I am an actor, this is a theater, and I am always inside.

Once I believed my relationship to media was as either producer or consumer. Instead, on social media we are billions of co-creators within a much larger and continuous, (boundary-less) system of energies. The old channels or networks that once contained “news” have become subordinate, are simple delivery devices for narratives that can start anywhere and spread anytime, anywhere.

Energy is energy is energy.

When narratives are shaped into memes, those memes gain power by spreading. Even if I am quoting something and saying, “I can’t believe this!”—I am contributing to that energy, magnifying its impact. This is the toxic potential of propaganda in a free-press society. If memes spread through energy, the way memes work and shape behavior must also obey physics. Wouldn’t crowd behavior also have to be faithful to physics? When crowds are motivated to act, molecules get excited and move faster. When people feel motivated to act, we bring more energy to what we’re doing—regardless of what opinion we hold about the thing that agitated us. It’s a foreseeable outcome that if you heat water, it boils. If you agitate or excite a person, they will do...something.



So an unprecedented agitating force entered our culture in a quite determined way, and none of us seems to know how to get the force to stop agitating us. After 500 days, the efforts to inflame feel much more like doses of something than gaffes—like we are being conditioned. So I continue to wonder: What is the point?

Here’s one: We are all applying force and pressure across a single system of energy now, together—united in that we are all focused on a single person. Whenever he says something, we are giving that thing that he says energy.

We are all changing the form of this thing now.

2. That Ends Now.

Stormy was rocking a mauve suit like I think no one has ever rocked a mauve suit before. She walked out of a Manhattan courtroom April 16, where she’d attended a hearing concerning Michael Cohen and his client list. April-16-Stormy was not the same Stormy with the bright button-down shirt straining awkwardly against her cleavage that Anderson Cooper had interviewed just a few weeks earlier, for *60 Minutes*. On that day, despite the distracting wardrobe, Stormy had been poised, polite, emotionally warm if a tad guarded while she chatted with Anderson at home in Texas.

Except for the fact that she was dishing about a decade-old affair with the married current President, Stormy on *60 Minutes* was any of us on a job interview: friendly, even-tempered, firm but positive—trying to make a nice impression on America.



But on April 16, live-across-America Stormy was angry. She walked out of the courthouse with her eyes down, wind blowing her long hair. She looked up as she approached the microphones and cameras. CNN’s chyron identifies her as Stormy Daniels, Adult film star; [the network’s clip](#) is just 42 seconds. In open defiance of the off-screen legal opponents who expected her to remain silent forever, she spoke with her hands behind her back, except for a couple of times she brushed strands of hair from her face, and once she pointed to indicate her lawyer, Michael Avenatti, who stood at her left side, facing her. Her voice cracked and she seemed to grow angrier as she spoke, as if her own words were making her furious.

She said:

“Hi, everyone. So, for years, Mr. Cohen has acted like he is above the law. He has considered himself and openly referred to himself as Mr. Trump’s fixer. He has played by a different set of rules, or should we say no rules at all. He has never thought that the little man or especially women—and even more, women like me—mattered. That ends now. My attorney and I are committed to making sure that everyone finds out the truth and the facts of what happened. And I give my word that we will not rest until that happens. Thank you very much.”

This was no simple press statement, and she is not talking about the fact that she hooked up with Trump kinda reluctantly after a public appearance or that she kept in touch with him afterward, in case he decided to put her on *The Apprentice*. When she says, “the truth and the facts,” she’s talking about more than watching Shark Week at the Beverly Hills Hotel.

3. Stormy is the Water

Michael Avenatti, told Anderson Cooper in the same episode of *60 Minutes* that Stormy’s case “is about the extent that Mr. Cohen and the President have gone to intimidate this woman, to silence her, to threaten her, and to put her under their thumb. It is thuggish behavior from people in power. And it has no place in American democracy.”

The wealthy and powerful class has always leveraged the luxuries of their world—the one without the usual laws—to seduce beautiful people like Stormy, like Melania. Capitalism is not about efficiency or equity, only profit, and insecure men of means see a beautiful woman not just as trophy but as a dividend paid for business success. Seduction, then, is a form of arbitrage—the negotiation of the space between two unlike things.



By Flickr user [DonkeyHotey](#)

So the powerful approach the powerless, or the less-powerful, as things to be managed, and during the campaign it is clear that Stormy Daniels was, to Michael Cohen, something which required some management. Stormy was managed in a way that Rudy Giuliani suggested—much to the chagrin of his now-former firm—was the usual manner. (Usual, of course, means of a piece with those who have secrets and can also afford to pay lawyers to contractually bind others to keep them.) Given the election, Cohen had to deliver and he would have seen only one possible outcome. The money, the sex: neither is as important as what the President’s lawyer did to secure that signature, to handle that thing for the boss.

Power is force. Force is pressure. Pressure changes the state of things.

From the 2011 interview Stormy gave, it’s clear she did not consider hooking up with Donald Trump a secret, let alone a dirty secret. It was a thing that happened, and her inner circle knew about it. A decade later, in a stark moment of literal erasure, Stormy Daniels was hiding even her name as she signed that 2016 document. The shame is not Stormy’s.

If the agreement was supposed to silence her voice, she has found it again. On April 16, she was using that voice to speak truth to Power itself. Not the power of Donald Trump but the structure that surrounds and supports him and Harvey Weinstein and who knows how many like them. How

many have been silenced?



In 104 words, as Stormy Daniels fought for the right to her voice, she seemed to know she was fighting not just Trump and Cohen but every one of their kind. She is doing important and brave work on behalf of others who are silently screaming all the secrets they're keeping, for someone else's shame. Slowly, over time, and largely through her attorney, Stormy is revealing the power structure, pointing to its levers and the buttons and the people who keep it running. It reminds me of the philosopher Lao Tzu describing water's ability to carve mountains: "Water is fluid, soft, and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft, and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. This is another paradox: what is soft is strong."

The reason I am comparing her to a force of nature is because when Stormy Daniels found her voice—Stormy Daniels, Adult film star, the person that talking heads keep trying to dismiss because she chooses to have sex on-camera to feed her kid—a career which she points out is perfectly legal—the person who is using his office and voice and force as a personal megaphone to change the very state of everything in the world was finally silent.

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