



## When Is the Now? Monitoring Disaster in the Expansion of Time

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This essay inquires into the temporalities that emerge in the context of online news of extreme nature events. It draws on a larger empirical study of what has become a dominant template for online reports on disasters of a different character, scale, and location: short videos, Web TV clips, and series of stills published in a real-time aesthetic frame. In this article, this case study is used as a background for a more theoretical discussion of three temporal registers in particular: (1) the paces and rhythms of the modes of publication and address that this template supports; (2) the interaction of past, present, and future in online news of disasters; and (3) the sense of extended temporalities that emerge from contemporary reports of nature emergencies and geological extremes. The essay also engages with two recurring themes in media history: first, the relationship between new media technologies and the modern notion of an increasingly pervasive culture of the now; and second, the long-standing role of disasters in the history of exploring new media formats and technologies.

*Keywords: nature emergencies, temporality, online news, history, real time, template, archive*

Images of floods, hurricanes, droughts, and earthquakes are so ubiquitous in contemporary media environments that they almost immediately move into the background. This trajectory is indeed internal to the structural rhythm of online news streams, which is characterized by the combination of flash-like visual effects and a routine of continuous updates by which earlier postings inevitably move downward and are soon disposed of and stored in background archives. The dominant template for front-page reports on nature emergencies in this context was introduced in the early 2000s. It typically consists

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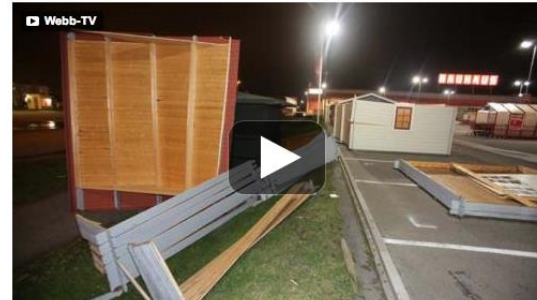
of a clickable image linked to a video, moving images in Web TV format, or a series of stills. It is framed in a real-time aesthetic with captions pointing to the urgency of ongoing events (see Figure 1).



## Tsunami efter stort skalv utanför Chile      Cyklonen slår mot Indien - flera döda

300 fångar rymde från kvinnofängelse. Minst fem människor döda. 36 ▶ Hundratalsentals evakueras. Stora materiella skador på Indiens östkust.

### STORMEN "SIMONE"



## Just nu: Orkan i Halmstad hamn

DN rapporterar direkt. När ovädret nu når Sverige, så kan det stundtals nå våldsamt styrka. Antalet rapporterade strömbrott ökar snabbt. 50  
 Reporter till DN: Vi fick ta skydd undan fallande plankor.

**Figure 1. Screenshots from <http://www.dn.se>. (upper left) "Tsunami after major quake off Chile" (April 2, 2014). (upper right) "The cyclone hits India—several killed" (October 12, 2014). (bottom) "Right now: Hurricane in the harbor of Halmstad" (October 28, 2013).**

The contours of this template, its brief history, and significance for the contemporary encounter with extreme nature events, were established through a case study of the news site of the major Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* (<http://www.dn.se>), carried out between 2011 and 2015. Although I deal with this material in greater detail in a forthcoming study, this essay builds on some of the insights gained from this

empirical work to develop a broader and more theoretical approach to the temporalities of online news of nature emergencies.

The material collected for the case study consists of more than 200 screen shots of front-page postings relating a wide range of disasters. It documents the relatively static character of the template over time, the frequency of reports on nature emergencies in this context, its editorial practices, and the relation to similar news sites. About 90% of the material relates extreme nature events of a different type, scale, and duration, from local storms that never arrived to major earthquakes and floods. The remaining 10% is on other emergencies, including historic disasters. The number of postings on past disasters increased during the five-year period and enables a discussion of how different events and temporal registers are linked to each other and made to interact through the workings of this news template. I return to the double nature of the template of both news site and archive in the last sections of the essay, using some findings from the case study to discuss how a real-time frame was used both to convey a sense of ongoing disaster and to reenact past moments of the now.

Although many of the images collected for the larger study were also published in other contexts and across different media and countries, it is essential not to treat the material as Internet driftwood. Only by following the development of this template in one particular environment is it possible to say something about the changing character and frequency of reports on natural hazards in the context of daily news flows. Such an approach can also provide insights into the manner in which this mode of reporting ongoing as well as expected emergencies takes shape in the context of hour-by-hour digital editing and copying and the different agencies that go into this work. Furthermore, and vital to the historical analysis that is developed in this essay, a medium-specific perspective makes visible the role of nature dramas in the exploration of emerging media more generally. "Real-time" displays of catastrophic events almost by rule coincide with the display of the medium itself, a relation between technology and natural disasters with a long lineage in media history (Ekström, 2012, 2016).

### **Real-Time Disaster**

The main focus of this essay, however, is on the different temporalities that are conveyed by the monitoring of extreme nature events. Several theorists have argued that a "temporality of emergency" (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010, p. 10; Calhoun, 2010) has become ever more pervasive under late capitalism. Ulrich Beck (1986) argued in the 1980s that a state of emergency was normalized in risk society. For Giorgio Agamben (2005), the idea of a permanent state of exception—a state "in which the emergency becomes the rule" (p. 22)—culminated with the post-9/11 declaration of the "War on Terror" but was already in play during World War II. Others claim that societies around the world are increasingly governed through an optics of disaster, fueling interventionist actions and calls for military order not only in relation to war and catastrophe but also to a wide range of social and cultural conflicts (Fassin & Pandolfi, 2010).

With climate change and the environmental crisis a "temporality of emergency" has become associated with the nature-culture nexus as well. The frequency and haste by which reports on extreme nature events move into the cultural background do not mean that they do not carry meaning (cf.

Ekström & Kverndokk, 2015). To the contrary, repetition is a recurrent *modus operandi* in the way media and cultures deal with disasters. It works in a sense to normalize extreme events, to make them part of the social imaginary (Taylor, 2004), or, maybe better, a cultural archive that is both hidden for view and active in shaping our present perceptions and future traces.

The ongoing "catastrophization" (cf. Ophir, 2010) of nature also brings an equal focus on climate-related hazards such as heat waves, floods, and storms, on the one hand, and unusual weather events, erupting volcanoes, and earthquakes, on the other. As this study details, clickable images in a real-time frame, linked to Web TV clips or slideshows, have emerged as one of the *cultural techniques*—I use this term in a similar sense as the German concept of *Kulturtechniken* (see Winthrop-Young, Iurascu, & Parikka, 2013), which aims to bridge the gap between, on the one hand, infrastructures and tools, and, on the other, immaterial devices and routines—that draw these different natures together.

This article looks both inside and outside this news template to understand how it connects different emergencies and temporalities. Time is approached in its experiential aspects, not as something to measure or unify. In the context of this case study, and within a larger project on time and disaster of which it is part, I want to think about the temporal and historical rhythms that are attached to extreme nature events and how they are composed in and by contemporary media. Rhythm is a notoriously vague and yet evocative concept to the analysis of cultural change (see, e.g., Henriques, Tiainen, & Väliaho, 2014). Its obscurity as a tool for thinking about time and history is illustrated, among others, by Henri Lefebvre (1992/2004) in his work on "rhythmanalysis." Its usefulness in approaching changing notions of time and nature is no less obvious. To the moderns, paraphrasing Latour (1993), the divide between nature and culture inspired celebrations of nature's rhythms in terms of the slow, circular, and unchanging patterns that were outside modern time. Here, keeping the musical connotations of the term in mind, I use *rhythm* to refer to the varying tempos that are associated with history and nature, the punctuation of time into event time and now time, and the tension between rupture time and repeat time that characterizes online reports of nature emergencies. More generally, I suggest that these media rhythms resonate with a deep-seated amalgamation of repetition and disruption in the history of disaster discourse (Ekström, 2012).

The essay also reflects on the historical resonances of the dubious notion of "real time." As the case study of the website of *Dagens Nyheter* richly exemplifies, online news images of nature emergencies are superficially framed to emphasize the spectacular here-and-now of events. This was reinforced by a stereotyped set of captions that focus on the visual and simultaneous: "See a flooded Sri Lanka" (February 7, 2011; when nothing else is indicated all dates refer to <http://www.dn.se>); "Here the mountains are collapsing around Rio" (January 13, 2011); "Right now: Hurricane in the harbor of Halmstad" (October 28, 2013). The combination of such words and (moving) images invites an understanding of the events as sudden and disruptive. In some cases, authenticity was added by documentary sound. A repeated "Oh my god" or "Wow" (March 12, 2011) from the photographer or a nearby cowitness also has the effect of reminding the viewer of the speculative and uncertain origins of the images, implicating a position that transcends the distinction between media witness and victim of the disaster. The amateur production of images of nature emergencies is a flourishing genre of small-screen culture, gathered at websites devoted to "real-time disaster." In the context of the news template that this article explores, images provided by

victims and amateurs function to emphasize that real time is *real* time, meaning that this way of framing reports on emergencies works both as a technique for the production of liveness and for suggesting that disasters create a sense of an intensified now.

The concept of frame or framing is not in itself sufficient, however, to explain how climate hazards, weather extremes, and natural and other disasters are connected and catalogued within this medium. Neither are the concepts of archive, algorithm, remediation, or any related concept from more recent media theory. John Durham Peters (2015) makes a fundamentally important point in arguing that digital media, when compared with the mass media of the 20th century, are less about content than about the structuring and organizational powers of an infrastructure. News websites are a composite of different media, both old and new, and to explore how they structure time in relation to extreme nature events, it is necessary to adjust the analytical tools to this hybrid nature. It would be misleading, I argue, to approach the history of this media template from a distinction between technology and content, or between infrastructure and meaning. As a consequence, when I say “in” this medium or template, it does not mean *in the content of* but rather *in the environment of* this medium or template. Such an inclusive conceptualization of medium avoids separating content from form, frame, or apparatus, and allows for an analysis of the means by which this template simultaneously creates news and archives.

### **The Long *Durée* of Media History**

Despite the novelty of the genre of online news of disasters and the actuality of its mode of address, it is deeply embedded with media history. The use of Web TV clips in online news streams is the perfect example of a successful reintroduction of an old medium in the context of a more recent one. In relation to images of nature emergencies and other disasters, one important aspect of this layering of media forms is the merging of televisual and digital modes of liveness. It also should be noted that floods, hurricanes, and erupting volcanoes play a pervasive role in the long history of media innovation. In the early history of both theater and film, natural disasters were a recurrent motif in exploring the affordances and affective powers of the medium (Ekström, 2012, 2016). Indeed, it seems as if almost every new medium—including various signaling and warning systems, telegraph networks, radio, and the Internet—was tried out and defined in relation to emergencies and war in its early history.

A striking element of historicity also informs the spectacular realism of online news of extreme nature events. Two aspects are crucial in this respect: scale and movement. The scaling techniques and especially the miniaturizing of events in small-screen digital environments (cf. Pietrobruno, 2012) are preceded by the tradition of moving miniature scenes of nature dramas in late 18th- and 19th-century spectacular theater and visual media. In both cases, an element of shock is combined with grand scenes to produce what can be described as the small sublime. As Walter Benjamin (1931/1972) noted, the art of diminution paradoxically entails both an enhanced form of realism and a sense of mastery of the events. This still holds true in the digital environment: The miniature frame of images of ongoing disaster creates an odd effect of both estrangement and pressing realism.

Again, there is in this moving image history an equal focus on the reality of disaster and media display. In this respect, Web TV clips of extreme nature events also share some of their properties with

early film. Storms, fires, moving waters, and falling buildings abound in film around the turn of the 20th century. The sense of the real attached to the new medium of film emerged from the interaction between the display of moving images and the movement in the motif. Early film was also used to look back on and reflect on major natural disasters. The work of film pioneer Georges Méliès exemplifies the cinematic interest in storing the blasting moment of the catastrophic now. In his 1902 "reconstructed actuality," a prolific genre of early cinema, Méliès famously performed the devastating eruption of Mount Pelée on the island of Martinique—which in May 1902 ruined its capital Saint-Pierre and killed approximately 30,000 people—in a minute-long sequence, using a combination of techniques developed in 19th-century spectacular theater, disaster reenactments, dioramas and panorama rotundas, and the moving images of the new medium of film.

This intermedial exchange is internal to the history of disaster imagery, and is no less present in contemporary small-screen culture. In this historical context, an aesthetic of real time emerges that is not primarily about simultaneity, but evolves around the notion of moments of an intensified now and its reenactment. Aesthetics in this moving image history should be understood in its basic meaning of sense perception and physical address (Buck-Morss, 2000). Similarly, time is in relation to this aesthetic both physical and made present as an event, but in an experiential rather than chronological or calendrical sense.

The historical context of contemporary notions of real time and liveness has not been addressed properly in the literature on media and time. To the contrary, an overall focus on the now, taken to reflect a more general orientation toward presentism in contemporary society, is often supposed to be a distinguishing feature of new (i.e., digital) media environments. But this alliance between "new" (media) and "now" (time) is strongly rooted in media history (cf. Ekström, 2016). It was already an established critical trope in 19th-century discourses on the acceleration of time and a media-driven culture of "simultaneity" (Kern, 1983). In the 1980s and 1990s, the notion that new communication technologies fostered an ever-expanding present reappeared in the writings of theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Paul Virilio, who argued that contemporary societies were obsessed "with 'real time'" and "the instantaneity of news" (Baudrillard, 1994, pp. 8–9; Virilio, 1997). With the digital turn, this critique of new media presentism became even more accentuated, both in early discussions on the information age (Castells, 2000) and in more recent critical engagement with the "eternal now" of online streams (Weltevrede, Helmond, & Gerlitz, 2014).

The idea of an affinity between new media and a culture of the now corresponds with a wider critical discourse on the ubiquity of the present in late modernity. Around the turn of the 21st century, a series of key contributions to cultural and historical theory argued that the past and the future were increasingly repressed by an ever-expanding present. This is what Fredric Jameson (2003) referred to as "the end of temporality." In a similar vein, François Hartog (2003) contends that a regime of a "monstrous present" (p. 217) has emerged in the wake of new communication technologies. Despite all their differences, what these and other theorists have in common is the idea of the contemporary experience of time as singular and homogeneous and increasingly presentist.

But in recent years a retemporalization of historical and cultural analysis has occurred. Some historians now take issue with the idea of the history of time as a succession of homogeneous regimes, and argue that time and temporalities have always been multiple (Jordheim, 2014). This turn depends on earlier critiques of the politics of time and especially periodization (Hunt, 2008) but is also reflected in current debates on the different time scales of historical work (Guldi & Armitage, 2014) and cross-disciplinary explorations into the relationship between the understanding of time in the historical and the natural sciences, especially in relation to the concept of deep time and Anthropocene debates (Ekström & Svensen, 2014; Robin, 2013). In media studies, there are signs of a parallel engagement with the multiple ways in which media intervene in experiences of time (Keightley, 2012), and, most important, the long durées of media history (Peters, 2015).

The decisive impetus for this reorientation is the intensified concern with issues of time scales and cross-temporal connections that emerge in the context of anthropogenic climate change (Chakrabarty, 2009). It makes it necessary to rethink the larger rhythms of nature and history, and draws critical attention to the ways in which past, present, and future interact and coexist, and how history simultaneously unfolds on different temporal spans. It also turns in a paradigmatic way, as I have argued elsewhere (Ekström, 2012), the critical issue of long-distance agency into a relation in time as much as in space, signaling a shift from the spatial bias of much late 20th-century cultural and social theory (as this was reflected, e.g., in the overwhelming influence of globalization theory, postcolonial theory, and actor-network theory).

It is to this development that this article and the larger project from which it draws seek to contribute. By exploring the media times of extreme nature events, and how past, present, and future are brought together, organized, and made to interact within this template, I mean to question the view that new media flatten the experience of time into a totalizing now (cf. Uprichard, 2012). The analysis of these different temporalities should be anchored both in the specificities of the medium and an historical and contextual approach. In this perspective, the brief history of this template not only reflects on the media history of disaster imaginaries—and its recurrent and contradictory rhythm of emergency and routine—but also on the proliferation of online reports on nature emergencies as a metaphor for broader changes in contemporary understandings of the paces and rhythms of nature and history.

### **Connecting Disasters, Extending Times**

News of the geographically distant has always, it seems, and regardless from where the distance is measured, been unproportionally focused on calamities. The ethics of watching remote and mediated suffering has been a topic of much critical concern (see, e.g., Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2006; Sontag, 2003), and continues to be explored in research on audience reactions to disaster in changing media environments (see, e.g., Joye & von Engelhardt, 2015).

But as the near and distant are drawn into each other in ever more complex ways, many of the guiding distinctions of this critical discourse are, however, unsettled. Not only do new technologies create an increasing proximity between media witnesses and victims, there is also an ongoing dedistancing of the world connected to the changing nature of disasters themselves. In the context of global warming, the

time space of emergencies is expanding and fundamentally altered. What moves through the atmosphere is not confined to any place, nation, or region. Added to this uncertainty regarding the spatial limits of climate-related and environmental hazards is a growing awareness of their temporal complexity. In the case study of <http://www.dn.se>, this not only was reflected in an uncertainty about the temporal duration of extreme events but also in a sense of proliferating cross-temporal connections and dependencies. In this context, the emerging rhythms of nature and history thus manifest in an understanding of natural emergencies as both process and event, simultaneously framed in a perspective of forecasting and deep history, and invoking a temporality of "slow disasters" (Heise, 2013) as much as a catastrophic now.

"Poor Swedes!" ["die Schweden, die armen!"], Ulrich Beck (1986) exclaimed in May 1986, reflecting on the northwestern winds from Chernobyl. According to this astute response to the event, the nuclear cataclysm marked a new order of emergencies in which there were no longer any privileged safe zones from where disasters could be contemplated from a distance. This demonstrated, Beck argued, how fundamentally interlinked not only nature and society but also "weather and history" had become in what he referred to as the "second modernity." First and foremost, however, it was the spatially transgressive nature of contemporary risks that formed the basis of Beck's argument, as it did of late 20th-century globalization theory more generally. Eventually, the globally space-binding forces of disasters fostered the idea of a new cosmopolitanism—or, in Beck's formulation, "a cosmopolitan vision"—which was expected to emerge from the experience of being exposed to increasingly connected and identical hazards around the world (Beck, 2006; Beck, Blok, Tyfield, & Zhang, 2013).

In the early 21st century, this concern with spatially transgressive relations is taking a temporal turn, as the uncertainty regarding the extension in time of contemporary emergencies is foregrounded. A sense of multiple and extending temporalities is further enforced by the way in which climate-related hazards and geological extremes open a wide range of issues of how societies impact each other over great distances in time. What could be described as the time-binding aspect of anthropogenic climate change also becomes visible in the daily flow of reports on extreme nature events, especially through the new presence of the future and prognostic elements that are added to such reports. This concern with cross-temporal relations is also exemplified by an emerging discourse on a set of related concepts—for example, "chronopolitanism" (Cwerner, 2000) and "chronopolitics" (Klinke, 2013)—that focus on the politics of the extension of time.

There is a related development in media theory. Peters (2015) argues that clouds and oceans again become visible as "elemental media" in the wake of the Anthropocene. I propose that the technological setup of the culture of small media as well as the collapsing distinction between human and nonhuman agencies—that is, what Beck referred in passing to as the intertwinement of weather and history—pushes us to think of floods, heat waves, and storms not primarily as "media events" (Dayan & Katz, 1992) but again as media and events. As events, nature emergencies are stretched out in time and increasingly experienced as being anchored in multiple temporalities. As media, they appear not only as space-binding but also time-binding (cf. Innis, 1950/2007), intensifying the links between communities scattered in time. And it is, I argue, a similar tendency toward extending, multiplying, and connecting times—rather than an all-encompassing now or present (cf. Gumbrecht, 2014)—that characterizes the temporal rhythms of monitoring nature emergencies in online news.



A sense of connectedness is also attached to disastrous events themselves. It is visible in the loss of distinctions between various crises, between technological and natural calamities, between hazards related to global warming and geological extremes. Again, this enforces an understanding of crises and disasters not as singular events but as “*endemic to*” the current global order (Cottle, 2014). In the context of online news, such a view is supported by the sheer frequency of reports on extreme nature events and their flash-like and routinized appearance. In the material that was collected for the case study of the website of *Dagens Nyheter*, the same template was used for relating emergencies of a very different scale and location. Weather extremes, climate-related hazards, and technological emergencies were primarily drawn together by four major aspects.

First, there is the difficulty of demarcating one event from another. To the same extent as various crises are entangled in chains of events, it has become increasingly difficult to make any clear-cut distinctions between the different forces—human and nonhuman, natural and technological—that operate in disasters. The Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 is a telling example of the connected nature of contemporary disasters. The earthquake triggered a series of interconnected calamities of various durations: tsunami waves and flooding, the Fukushima nuclear explosion and fire, the slow and ongoing catastrophe of radiation and environmental effects, financial and social crises. Given the complex character of such emergencies, there are in fact strong reasons for associating extreme events of a different nature and, thus, transcending the divide between the natural and the technological in images of contemporary disasters.

In the news material, the entanglement of emergencies in complex chains of events also translates into an uncertainty of when disasters end. During the entire period of the case study, Web TV clips, photographic stills, and real-time reruns from the Fukushima disaster continued to appear within the same template. In some cases, the postings asked, “Is it over yet?” (March 10, 2013). In others, modes of commemorating the event in a real-time frame were introduced at the website (March 28, 2013). This illuminates the difficulty of zoning off the disaster, both in temporal and spatial terms. In relation to temporality, such postings also implicate that present and past—the ongoing chain of events, on the one hand, and, on the other, its transformation into history—unfold in parallel in a complex temporal coexistence.

Second, different emergencies were associated with each other by the context of their presentation. Throughout the brief history of this template of online news, top-page clickable images pointing toward an ongoing now were engaged for visual reports on local storms, far-away eruptions, and mass-killing droughts and floods. From the inception of the template, a spectacular aesthetic and mode of address were developed that both elaborated its medium-specific possibilities as well as engaged with historical and intermedial genres. This framing of emergencies through genre and medial conventions creates continuity between different events, and in a sense routinizes a temporality of emergency in the context of online news.

Third, extreme events were connected by discourse. In the material collected from <http://www.dn.se>, a discourse of climate crisis not only was present in visual reports of heat waves, droughts, and floods, but also in reports of a wider range of ongoing and expected emergencies. Most

significant, it was increasingly implicit in, and a prerequisite for, the growing ubiquity of images of unusual weather events and geological extremes. The prognostic dimension of this discourse links the geographically near and distant as well as ongoing and oncoming events, connecting nature emergencies across both space and time. The pervasiveness of this discourse in contemporary media coincides with a major historical shift in the temporal regimes of nature representation. Waning is the modernist imagination of nature as the slow and repetitive background to human affairs; emerging is a focus on the erratic and accelerating character of changing landscapes.

Fourth, crises and extreme events were linked metaphorically. This means, for example, that emergencies of nature are framed as wars, financial crises as forces of nature, and local storms as a portent of global warming. These metaphorical links increase the pervasiveness of a language of emergency in public discourse. It is further stabilized in the use of neologisms such as, for example, *väderbomb* ["weather bomb"] and *skuldstorm* ["debt storm"], insisting that weather extremes can be known through war and financial crises through emergencies of nature (May 23, 2011; December 10, 2014).

Taken together, the connected nature of contemporary disasters brings a sense of urgency and disruption to the pace of the world. There is no doubt that the cultural force of this temporality of emergency has intensified through increasingly connected media ecologies, that is, the convergence of old and new technologies, the use of mobile phones and wireless infrastructure, and an overall "enhanced capacity for media visualisation" (Cottle, 2014, pp. 5–6; see also, e.g., Leyda & Negra, 2015) of disasters. It is not as obvious, however, that the temporalities that this development entails are captured by such modernist terms as *speed*, *simultaneity*, and the *collapse of time*. To the contrary, a media-historical perspective rather suggests that as new connections are made between different media and events, new links also emerge between past, present, and future, and with them a multilayered conjunction of times.

### **When Is the Now?**

And yet, there is in media history a pervasive notion that some media have a particularly strong hold on the now. Whether such a quality of the now is conceived in terms of technological affordances, aesthetic framing, or the collective meaning-making activities of users, there is an inevitable element of historical continuity in such claims. Thus, any claim of the medium-specific capacity of digital news environments to "capture the now" builds on the status of old technologies and is thoroughly enmeshed in photographic metaphors (cf. Hunt & Schwartz, 2010).

The aim in this section is not, however, to develop this historical argument further, but to close in on the template of online news to turn to the composition of the now as a temporal category in the context of nature emergencies. My interest here lies in the different temporal rhythms and time spans that combine in the encounter with nature extremes in this media environment. Five aspects have been identified as crucial in this respect through the larger empirical case study: (1) publication routines and frequency of updates, (2) temporal modes of address, (3) interface delays and suspensions, (4) conventions of premediation, and (5) articulations of past moments of the now. Taken together, I argue, these temporal registers create a thickened and conflicted experience of time, which points to the

topicality of extreme nature events for an emerging sense of multiple temporalities in contemporary societies.

### ***Publication Rhythms***

During the entire period of the case study, reports on nature emergencies appeared with a staggering frequency. In almost any week between 2011 and 2015, visitors to the news site were exposed to numerous nature dramas. For example, in the last week of October 2011, Web TV clips from a severe earthquake in Turkey were published alongside images from floods in Thailand and northern Italy. Over a period of 10 days in October and November 2013, videos and elaborate series of stills visualized storms over Great Britain and Sweden as well as the “super typhoon” that hit the Philippines. The third week in September 2015, an erupting volcano in Japan shared the template with tsunami waves, an earthquake in Chile, and Web TV clips of landslides and a “falling mountain” in Norway. This pattern was consistent throughout the five-year period of the study. Indeed, there were single days when several reports of rising waters, heavy storms, and geological extremes were published next to each other and framed in a similar manner (October 28, 2013; December 28, 2015). In some cases, the events were explicitly described as interrelated; in others, they were metaphorically linked and associated to each other by the template.

Obviously, the amount and character of this material do not in any simple way reflect the global distribution of extreme nature events. Its overall publication pattern should rather be described as both routinized and highly irregular. Whereas some events were visible for only a brief moment in a single image or video, others became the topic of extended reporting. In some cases, updates were made on a daily or hourly basis; other emergencies became a source of follow-ups for years. The lifespan of comparable events thus differs considerably within this media environment. However, all of these publication rhythms—from the flash-like visualization of a single moment to the serialized reporting of disasters with unclear endings—were realized within the same template.

It is also obvious that these publication patterns reflect the circulation and availability of images as much as the severity of the events. Image bureaus and emerging practices of amateur reporting, the communicative work of victims and witnesses, news pirating, and converging technologies are all important factors in the proliferation of emergency imagery. Also, there is an ongoing process of genre making in the material. One striking aspect is how one event makes other events visible. In the weeks following major disasters, for example, the typhoon Haiyan in November 2013, the publication of images of minor storms from around the world increased. By naming and visualizing the events in a similar manner, they were associated by the template and its modes of address as much as by the character and origin of the events themselves.

The frequency of reports on extreme nature events was also a function of its role in the development of Web design. Given the status of online news sites as a culturally dominant medium, it is vital to keep the brevity of its history in mind. Front-page design in online news sites started to evolve in the 1990s (Ihlström & Lundberg, 2004) with videos and Web TV clips introduced in the 2000s. Nature dramas such as rising waters, storms, and geological extremes were a recurrent motif in exploring these new possibilities. When a new overall design of dn.se was launched in October 2011, one innovation was

the front-page slideshow (October 25, 2011). It was presented in series of stills from flooding in Thailand and an earthquake in Turkey. The main news in this case was not, however, the rising waters but the additions to the template itself, again emphasizing how intrinsically linked the history of disaster imagery is with media display.

### ***Temporal Modes of Address***

On the level of address, this template is framed to operate in a real-time mode. In this context, a real-time mode refers both to the speed of publication and the authenticity of the events. The impression of monitoring ongoing events is conveyed by hasty editing and captions that invite acts of live witnessing. Standardized headlines such as "Right Now" emphasize the closeness of the postings in time to the events that are described (October 28, 2013; December 12, 2013). Even more common are captions that invoke the repertoire of eyewitnessing by addressing the onlooker with a simple "See" or "Here Are," presenting the template as an open window to global disasters (February 7, 2011; April 28, 2015).

Further adding to a sense of live monitoring are the temporal implications of the logic of updates. However, this does not necessarily point to the now. In this media environment, it is rather as if each sentence and image say, "There is more to come!" The expectation of updates brings urgency to the events but also legitimacy to sloppy editing, poor language, and a lack of analytical approach.

Being up to date in this context also reflects a fear of being late in publishing images that would otherwise be available in other contexts. Today, when evolving disasters and extreme nature events are reported on sites such as Facebook and Flickr (cf. Kverndokk, 2015) and images circulate between news sites and amateur media, there is constantly the risk of publishing videos and photos already seen. If anything, this development makes the template of online news less instantaneous as it will never be as quick in posting images of ongoing emergencies as the victims themselves.

### ***Interface Delays and Suspensions***

Despite its real-time frame, users experience various delays and moments of unexpected suspension when interacting with this template. Besides technological aspects, such as slow downloading, delays also occur on a content level. Throughout the period of this study, clickable images linked to series of photos or a short sequence of moving images, usually no longer than a few minutes but often considerably less, continued to be an important feature of reports on nature emergencies. They were typically introduced in the style of a frozen image waiting to be activated by the users.



## Tv: Dubbeltornado utplånar samhälle

▣ Evakuering har beordrats. Svärm av tornador i nordöstra Nebraska. 012

**Figure 2. Screenshot from <http://www.dn.se>. "TV: Double tornado obliterates community" (June 17, 2014).**

However, if the visitors to the news site choose to respond to the urgent address and click the still to "go live," there is usually an odd moment of delay as the images are preceded by an advertising film. For example, on September 27, 2011, a clickable image was published with the caption "Here is the typhoon coming in over the Philippines." A one-minute video was linked to this entry but only came on after a 15-second commercial for heat pumps. On June 17, 2014, a frozen image with the caption "TV: Double tornado obliterates community" implied that a click on the arrow would immediately set the winds in motion. However, first and last in this link came a commercial for a car brand (see Figure 2).

Real time is thus a news style that enables mixed temporalities. The common practice of interleaving advertising videos between images of ongoing disaster effectively interrupts the "right now" of the address. In some cases, this editing practice appears as a macabre way of keeping the onlooker in suspense. More than anything, however, it contributes to the routinization of emergencies in this media environment. The user's experience of the urgency of the event is mixed with annoyance and distraction. Obviously, there always will be different sorts of delays and time lags in the transmission of data, both between different machines and between humans and humans. However, the version of the now that this template promotes is also defined by the conflicting rhythms that emerge from its way of equalizing events of a vastly different character. This lack of hierarchization is nothing like a "flow" or "live stream," but leaves a sense of interruption and stuckness.

### **Conventions of Premediation**

The design of this news template signals a focus on the present. However, in the five-year period covered by the empirical study, an increasing amount of material was not on ongoing emergencies but on future events. This tendency manifested in a growing number of images of people around the world preparing for weather extremes and natural disasters (January 14, 2014; June 1, 2015; see Figure 3). It was visible in reports on expected tsunamis, falling mountains, and storms that never materialized. It also was reflected in forecasts of the expected trajectory of weather extremes. This shift of temporal focus from ongoing to oncoming hazards fueled major media build-ups, connecting people and places by the direction of the winds. In some cases, the premonitions of emergency that failed were followed by explanations; in other cases, the warnings just faded away.



**Figure 3. Screenshots from <http://www.dn.se>. (left) "Thousands escape eruption" (January 14, 2014). (right) "Japan fears a stronger earthquake" (June 1, 2015).**

"Be prepared for something worse than we have ever experienced," the mayor of New York was quoted saying on January 26, 2015. Two days later, images of the closed city were published with the caption "Meteorologists: Forgive us" (January 28, 2015). As the genre developed, so did a certain (self) ironic stance expressed in short postings on emergencies that never occurred. For example, in March 2015, a follow-up on one of the frequent earthquakes in Papua New Guinea declared, "The tsunami was three centimeters" (March 30, 2015).

This move toward an oncoming future is what media theorist Richard Grusin (2010) refers to as "premediation." It is a development characteristic of an "age of securitization," and yet it is deeply rooted in media history (cf. Ekström, 2016). The emerging conventions of premediation reinstate a longstanding, infrastructural link between communication technologies and warning systems. Today, the interconnection of media systems with systems for predicting geological and meteorological extremes is closer than ever. In the context of online news, this coupling enables two proliferating temporalities: forecast and suspense.

But it also expands time into prognosis. Images with captions such as “The super typhoon is approaching Japan” (October 11, 2014) or “Tropical cyclone threatens the coast of Mexico” (September 19, 2013) make two very different promises within this context: Not only can a disaster be expected but also more images of the now. However, as the empirical study progressed, such images were also increasingly framed as a portent of a warmer future. For example, this link was made explicit by the emerging editorial practice of publishing news on ongoing weather extremes next to reports of statistics documenting and forecasting a changing climate (January 2, 2015). This reflects an ongoing struggle to develop ways of narrating the relation between individual events and abstract developments over time. It also exemplifies how reports of nature emergencies entail continuous negotiations of different time spans.

The notion of “extreme weather” became widely used in different languages from the 1990s onward. Recent studies indicate that it originated as a concept of preparedness, drawing together events with a potential for disaster. Only later was it turned into a concept that pointed to the causes of the events that it was used to refer to (Kverndokk, 2015; Nilsen, 2014). This necessitated a distinction between “extreme weather events” and “extreme climate events.” In 2001, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change defined this as a distinction between, on the one hand, a weather event that is statistically rare within a particular location and, on the other hand, “an average of a number of weather events over a certain period of time, an average which is itself extreme” (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2001; quoted in Kverndokk, 2015, p. 237).

When rising waters and hurricanes became signs of anthropogenic climate change, images of the now were turned into images of the future. This also affected the event character of emergencies in this context. Through the emerging conventions of premediation, hazards of nature were simultaneously made to refer to the long term and to the immediate now. For not only has weather and history become increasingly connected, as Beck contended in 1986, but reports on weather extremes have taken on the temporality of history. It means that they are no longer connected with the immobile history of the cyclical and repetitive—or any other rhythm that is “beyond time’s reach and ravages” (Braudel, 1950/1980, p. 12)—but to human-induced historical change across different and extending time spans. There is no cultural lag in turning this era into the Anthropocene. In the empirical context of this study, this is how the present is incessantly described if not acted on.

### ***Past Moments of the Now***

Discussions on the temporal orientation of the medium of television, its “celebration of the instantaneous” (Doane, 1990, p. 222), and modes of liveness (Marriott, 2007) have often pointed to its encounter with catastrophe as significant for the relation it establishes to the now. Following in this tradition of phenomenological approaches to medium specificity, Paddy Scannell (2014) identifies two temporalities in broadcast news on extreme events: “the *forward moving present* of live-and-in-real-time coverage of an unfolding event as it happens and, on the other hand, the *retrospective present* of nightly news as it looks back on the events of the day” (p. 191).

The template of front-page online news transcends the notion of the presentness of television in several ways. Not only does it merge the televisual and the digital, and its respective news styles of

liveness and real time but it also bridges the temporal divide between archive and instant news by extending the moment of the now into the past and the future. For example, this expansion of time is materialized by the function of collecting Web TV clips and slideshows of extreme events in the archival background of the news site. Here, users can explore moving images of past moments of the now, catalogued in accordance with the template. The architecture of these background archives emphasizes their character of an archive of the medium itself.

More than anything, however, the expansion of the now into the past was accentuated by the use of the real-time template for front-page news on emergencies to remediate and recollect past events. For example, in 2011, the website of *Dagens Nyheter* contained moving images of the Challenger explosion in 1986, the terror attacks in the United States in 2001, and the air raids on Pearl Harbor in 1941 (January 27, 2011; March 12, 2011; September 6, 2011; September 7, 2011; December 7, 2011). In an odd mix of temporalities, these clips on past events were captioned in present tense and framed in a similar manner as the latest flood or tornado. Perhaps this was simply a result of keeping to the format—superimposing the now on the past—but it also appeared as an attempt to reanimate and display moments of mediated liveness in the past.

The publication of the historic clips coincided with anniversaries of the events. But it was also—at least supposedly—the anniversaries of paradigmatic examples of the history of live broadcasts, celebrating television within the framework of the digital. Again, in turning toward the past, this news template became involved both in constructing its own media history and in establishing a history of disasters. In the context of the real-time frame of this template, the reenactment of past moments of the now takes on a temporality of *liveness in repeat*. It is completely in tune with the rhythm of disruption and repetition that runs through the history of imagining disaster.

### **Conclusion: Archiving the Now**

In conclusion, the material that was collected for the case study of <http://www.dn.se> conveys an understanding of the now that is both deeply rooted in the past and full of messages of expected futures. Rather than a narrowing focus on the present, and regardless of its real-time aesthetic, the proliferation of images of extreme nature events in this news context translates into a growing sense of expanding time. This was reflected in the connected nature of contemporary disasters, the uncertainty about the ending and duration of extreme nature events, the increasing tendency toward premediation, and the coexistence of different time spans in reports on nature emergencies and geological extremes. In relation to research on media and time and media history more generally, this calls for less focus on the modern affinity between presentism and new media technologies and more on the complex temporalities that are emerging in historically embedded media environments.



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