

“Media Studies, Bodies and Technologies: Media Studies for a Living World

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1. From Technological Modernism to Ecological Modernism: Return of the Body

- The instrumental vision of modernity has allowed us to view technology as a collection of things that stand apart from humans and the environment. It has allowed us to view humans as standing apart from both technology and nature. And it has permitted us to be captivated by the spectacle of communication machines, while concealing the relationship between these machines, technologies, our bodies, and the rest of the living world....
- However, for the most part these efforts have ignored or failed to fully engage an embodied view of Media Studies from an evolutionary ecological perspective. That is, a perspective that views media as evolving mediations between the body and the biological and cultural environment.

2. From media objects to organisms in an environment

- One means to achieve this is to shift from what we would call the disembodied perspective of instrumental/mechanistic modernism, which encourages us to see the world from the objectivist perspective of nowhere, where science is narrowly understood as a kind of knowing that attends to a pre-existing hard reality and considers the messy problems of human experience as belonging to a non-empirical, separate world of feeling, values and qualities.

2. From media objects to organisms in an environment

- The shift we are proposing is to the perspective of people living in fleshy bodies, with sensations, feelings and emotions, that depend on one another as well as the and living world: what has been increasingly called an embodied perspective. This can be seen as an [epistemological] shift which grounds knowing in bodily experience rather than merely in some floating, linguistically constructed world or some out-there “objective” reality. It breaks down the body-mind dualism of a reductionist empiricism and opens the door to understanding “knowing” as an integration of environmental, biological, cognitive, and social experience and qualities.

3. What do we get by a turn to the body?

- The turn to the body, we suggest, gives us access to at least four important new dimensions of sense-making: experience, qualities, the relational sense of meaning through communication, and an understanding of morality as an emergent guide to action.

3. What do we get by a turn to the body?

- In all of these senses we can see the articulation of what we might call an ecological modernism, feet on the ground, toes in the dirt, evolutionary, where to be human is to be of, for and with the world, and where to be human is the growing achievement of the means to conceptualize, experience, appreciate and nurture this interdependent/integral quality of living.

4. What happened to technology?

- This is perhaps one of the greatest advantages of the turn to the body. Technology is no longer a collection of potentially overpowering machines that we need to reconcile our fleshy lives to. Rather technologies are understood as a collection of means, given material embodiment, by which we have mediated our relationship to the world. They can be seen as material embodiments of human desires and interests, not always well-formed or well-articulated or even well-understood, but means, nevertheless, by which we have transacted our relationship to the environment and to one another. And then, once set in material motion, we and the planet need to grapple with their ongoing and transformative consequences. The comforting illusion of the separation of subject and object vanishes.

4. What happened to technology?

- Science and its application through technologies can no longer be regarded as a value-free enterprise, but rather values and cultural orientations lie at the heart of the mediations we choose to make. It is the reason, Latour issues his injunction to “love your monsters,” with its provocative subtitle, “why we must care for technologies as we do for our children [9].” Separation is not an option. Taking the fullest responsibility for our and clarifying our intentions in their design, become urgent tasks in the effort to, as Latour and Beck write, modernize modernization [10]. In our terms, to move from an instrumental to an ecological modernism. In this sense the turn to the body puts our bodies back into relationship with the living world and with our tools and technologies.

5. Implications for Media Studies

- Start with the the phenomenological experience of the body in relationship to other bodies and the living world.
- Pay attention to the means that bodies use to bring themselves into relationship with each other and the living world.
- The body, particularly in relationship to other bodies and the living world brings means into existence which allow for new levels of of engagement and flourishing with others and the living world.
- Growth of meaning of our understanding of how we are a part of a living system and the felt experience of growth in this understanding gives meaning and purpose to human action.
- Technologies which pretend to be objects as ends in themselves, separate from human experience and human valuing, are calls for embodied inquiry.

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Thank you!