

Top Paper

The Body Medium and Media Ecology: Disembodiment in the Theory and Practice of Modern Media

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This essay explores the body as the radical medium that intersects with all communication media. Therefore the body medium is particularly germane for media ecology. I argue that modern communication media disembody through reducing or negating the body as a medium. Communication media disembody because they are predicated upon a theory that posits the separation of body and mind. This theory grounds the creation, implementation, and practices of communication media. As communication media are highly reflexive, disembodied theory and practices have great socio-cultural import. Throughout the essay, the work of Harold Innis and James W. Carey is used to demonstrate the value of engaging the body as medium, and to stimulate connections with media ecology.

Notwithstanding the diversity of approaches and problems, James W. Carey (1989/2009) distills the essence of media ecology's chief concerns in his claim that "structures of consciousness parallel structures of communication" (p. 123). The dialectic of consciousness and communications grounds explorations of communication media as central subjects. One medium—the most radical—has escaped critical scrutiny as a medium: the human body.

This article explores the body as a problem for media ecology. I argue that communication media disembody through diminishing or evacuating the body as a medium. Communication media disembody because they are predicated upon a theory that disembodies through separation of the body from the mind. This theory grounds the creation, implementation, and practices of communication media. As communication media are highly reflexive, disembodied theory and practices have great socio-cultural import. Throughout the article the work of Harold Innis and James W. Carey is used to demonstrate the value of engaging the body as medium and to stimulate connections with media ecology.

The body as medium and its disembodiment in the theory and practice of media is an imperative problem for media ecology. It is a gap in our understanding of the dialectic of consciousness and communication, and a new frontier for exploration. In not critically considering the body medium we may unwittingly reproduce disembodied conceptions of communication. The body as a medium is the most elementary part of communication. It is the medium through and with which all other media intersect and interact.

The article begins with a critical summary of the body as a medium. It draws on the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962/2002), which provides a heuristic framework for communication media and the body. This is followed by an examination of disembodiment and media through an application of phenomenology to modern media. The next section provides an historical sketch of disembodiment in theory. Rationalism and its influence on theories of consciousness are considered. Afterward, disembodiment in practice is scrutinized, with particular attention devoted to disembodied communication media. The final section critically analyzes disembodiment, power and modern media.

Body as Medium

Merleau-Ponty advanced a radical phenomenological conception of human subjectivity that overcame the mind-body dualism that plagues Western thought. The body is not “an object of the world,” and the mind its “transcendent master,” but “our means of communication with” the world (1962/2002, p. 106). Humans are “body-subjects,” as the body is our “medium for having a world” (p. 169). “Active corporeal (and intercorporeal) involvement in the world” characterizes the body-subject and perception (Crossley, 1996, p. 28).

As body-subjects our perception and consciousness are corporeal or embodied. In practical terms this means the body is our standpoint of and for perception (Crossley, 1996, p. 28). We are each somebody who perceives from somewhere. Embodiment also means perception is characterized by intentionality and action. Intentionality means perception is directed—focused upon one’s situation, environment, or world (Ihde, 1983, p. 53). And perception is not passive spectatorship divorced from a situation. Embodied perception is “creative receptivity” (qtd. in Reynolds, 2005). To perceive is to performatively engage in a situation with and through one’s senses. “Action frames perception whilst perception calls forth action” (Crossley, 1996, p. 28). Perception is a dialectical interaction between the body-subject and its environment that is constitutive of both (p. 27). Perception neither precedes nor follows consciousness. Perception and consciousness are intertwined with the body-subject. Consciousness is incarnate, and perception, mind, and body are abstract components of the body-subject.

More concretely, embodiment shapes how and what we perceive. Perception is not an interior, mental representation of an exterior world, but “an opening onto and into that world” (Crossley, 1996, p. 29). The body-subject and its environment are dialectically constitutive. Because perception is characterized by intentionality and action, how and what the body-subject perceives are intertwined with its situations. Sensations neither emanate from objects, nor do they derive from consciousness. Sensations are instead formed within “a gestalt structure that is meaningful for the body-subject” (p. 29). The body-subject does not take in all sensations of an environment but forms a structured perceptual field. This perceptual field is concomitant with the body-subject’s intentional action—its particular situation. What is a perceptual sensation emerges from its relation to the body-subject’s perceptual field,

“which provides the necessary relief for their outline and the contextual condition of their meaning” (p. 25).

If, for instance, I am fishing for trout (situation), and I have chosen to do so in a particular brook (structured perceptual field), then the perceptual sensations I will attend to are delimited. I will primarily be looking for things I know will increase my likelihood of catching trout on this brook: insects in, around, or on the water and pools in the brook where the water is deep and highly oxygenated. Within the structured perceptual field of my brook, particular insects (mayflies) stand out as perceptual sensations, while others (caterpillars) do not. This is not to suggest that I won't perceive anything else. My intention to fish will not be my only situation—it's a brook where I act, not a controlled environment like a lab. Therefore I must attend to other perceptions. These other perceptions are derived from other situations—avoiding being bitten by mosquitoes or protecting my skin from the sun—that intersect with or overlap with catching trout. Nevertheless my intention to catch trout and actions to bring it about will determine what I chiefly perceive while fishing.

Merleau-Ponty's conception of embodiment, the body-subject, means fundamentally that the body-subject is a means of communication, a medium for the world. Embodied perception suggests that we each have a standpoint, an embodied subject position, and that perception is intentional and active. Furthermore, the body-subject and its environment are mutually constitutive, with perception involving a gestalt—a structured perceptual field—that determines sensations and the objects of perception.

Disembodiment & Modern Media

Although modern media embody in some respects, they also disembody. Before fleshing out these characteristics I must pin down more precisely what I mean by embody and disembody. In an elementary sense, any medium that facilitates the separation of communicants or the body-subject from direct intercourse with its world disembodies communication. As the body is a medium, the elimination of its full presence disembodies. This is a medium's “reductive dimension” (Ihde, 1983, p. 56). Disembodiment not only reduces but tends to intensify the elements of expression that are included. Photographs disembody through reducing the aural, but intensify the visual. In addition, disembodiment can be intensive spatially and psychically. The radio is a space-binding medium—it conquers distance—but it also can be used to rework space locally. Network radio made communicative space national, while postwar radio colonized local space (Killmeier, 2005). Radio facilitates psychic mobility as well as intension. One can aurally travel to distant places or inwardly.

While disembodying, communication media also simultaneously embody it. As perception is embodied we could not communicatively use non-bodily media if they did not embody in some fashion. Media materially embody elements of expression—words, images, non-verbal cues, etc. This is their “amplificatory dimension” (Ihde, 1983, p. 55). Media not only amplify expression, but extend it in space and time as well. In this sense they are extensive.

A further qualification about media needs to be made. This essay is concerned with monologically structured media. Monologically structured media are organized for distributing expression in space in a one-way fashion. They are also structure less embodied perception, action and interaction. Monologic media constitute users as audiences, and cultivate disembodied perception and consciousness. Dialogically structured media provide for the exchange of expression and are therefore characterized by relatively greater embodiment. They constitute users as participants. Whether a medium is monologic or dialogic is not only a matter of the medium as a formal means of expression, but also its political economic architecture. Radio, as Bertolt Brecht pointed out, could be organized dialogically, which would open up radically different socio-political potentials.

A final matter is modern as an adjective. I define modern and modernity in terms of a period and social contrast. As a period, modernity is defined as beginning with the 18th-century Enlightenment in the West and the concomitant beginning of the mass production of print. As social contrast, modern societies contrast with traditional ones in terms of society over community, change over tradition, and disembodied communication over embodied communication.

In characterizing modern media or communication as disembodiment I am referring to the elementary separation or elimination of the body-subject from direct communicative interaction with others and the world. This diminishes the body as a communicative medium and attenuates subjectivity. This is modern media's radical reductive dimension. Disembodiment is particularly pronounced in monologically structured media which are emphasized in this article. Having pinned down these concepts and definitions we now turn to an historical overview of the theoretical origins of disembodiment.

Disembodiment in Theory

This section provides an intellectual historical sketch of disembodiment's theoretical origins. The purpose is to offer some context for the emergence of modern disembodied practices, in particular disembodied communication and media.

Cartesian rationalism in modern philosophy is mutually constitutive with modern rationalization of communication. Rationalism posits the duality of mind and body, mental and corporeal substances. Descartes claimed that the mind and body were separate substances, providing theoretic support for the separation of the human consciousness and the world, ideas and material reality. Consciousness is enclosed, cut off from the body, world, and others. Perception is the result of a constituting consciousness that precedes it, a disembodied subject that endows meaning onto an objectified world. In short, in the wake of Descartes consciousness becomes disembodied, with knowledge derived solely from reason. Even knowledge of the material world, although drawing upon sensory experience, ultimately rests upon reason and the mind.

Rationalism's theory of the disembodied consciousness seeded instrumental or representational thinking. It does not conceive of people as subjects dialectically intertwined with their perceptual objects and environment. Instead it situates people as subjects and the material world as objects. Instrumental thought supports a modern, partial conception of causality. If the world is objectified, and humans are subjects with mastery and dominion over it, the world becomes an instrumental resource. As Ortega y Gasset (1941) and Heidegger (1954/1993) suggest, there is nothing problematic in seeing the world as an arena for technical action, exploration, and innovation. This is part of what it means to be human. Human survival is dependent upon our collective capacity as technicians that modify our environment. The problem lies in the separation facilitated by disembodied consciousness and the resultant dualities that enact a theoretical and practical separation between body-subjects, others, and the material world. Such thinking leads us to consider our endeavors in the world and with others less as interactions than actions. Instrumental or representational thought supports a truncated conception of causality. Human endeavors are rendered instrumentally as the sole or chief agents. In contrast, as Heidegger (1954/1993) details, pre-modern conceptions of causality situated human endeavors within an interactive, mutually constitutive framework:

the *causa materialis*, the material, the matter...the *causa formalis*, the form, the shape . . . the *causa finalis*, the end . . . to which the [object] is determined as to its form and matter; the *causa efficiens*, which brings about the effect that is the finished [object]. (pp. 313-314)

Modern humans have elevated the *causa efficiens* and diminished the other three, fetishizing the action of an allegedly independent subject as causal agent.

Also derivative of disembodied consciousness and closely related to instrumental thought is spectatorial knowledge. Spectatorial knowledge posits that knowledge and understanding belong to detached observers/listeners rather than practitioners and actors (Cooper, 1999). It contrasts with knowledge as embodied practice. It disavows that knowledge and consciousness are derived as much from interaction, practice, and embodied perception as reflective thought. Upon spectatorial knowledge, a number of separations are enacted. Labor becomes attenuated into intellectual and manual distinctions, conceptually and practically denigrating both. This supports the modern undermining of the human role of technician in recent history. The technician, epitomized in the role of artisan labor, becomes bifurcated into the engineer and the worker with industrial production (Ortega y Gasset, 1941). Onto this division of labor further separations are built, including socioeconomic classes, as well as new forms of socioeconomic control, such as scientific management and outsourcing. Politics and citizenship in modern democracies is also affected by spectatorial knowledge. Citizens are conceived more in terms of spectatorship than active engagement, more objects of an instrumental discourse than fellow interlocutors in political dia-

logue and debate. Fundamentally, spectatorial knowledge abets the separation of theory and practice, impoverishing both.

Disembodiment in Practice

Rationalism and the idea of disembodied consciousness it spawned becomes a social force through practice. Rationalism as theory begets rationalization as praxis. Max Weber conceptualized rationalization to describe how rationalism became a modern social force. Rationalization's germane characteristics are: intellectualization and causality; objectification and depersonalization; development of technically rational means of control over people and the material world; and the ascendancy of instrumental action orientations (Brubaker, 2006; Ritzer, 2000). Weber examined rationalization in music, politics, religion, and the ideal type of bureaucracy. Rationalization also transformed industry, education, transportation, and communication in modernity.

The rationalization of communication begins with printing and extends forward with newer communicative media. It enacts a general disembodiment that reduces communication from holistic, intersubjective interactions to information. Information is characterized by rationality, absence, action, and control. Information tends toward the rational in comparison with embodied communication. Information objectifies communication, separating the subject and elements of its subjectivity. This is not to suggest that information is inherently rational in content, rather that owing to its distillations it tends to reduce communication to rational form. This formal rationality owes a good deal to the theory of disembodied consciousness—the separation of the rational from the affective and mind from body. Certainly print is rational, but what about newer audio-visual media, such as TV and film that distill less in the process of creating information? There is a continuum, and audiovisual media are arguably less rational. However, relative to embodied, holistic communication, audio-visual information is more rational.

The second characteristic of information—absence—is a particular type of radical depersonalization. The lack of presence of communicants, and their temporal and spatial separations, adds to the inherent distancing in information. Likewise, information distills through the reduction of presence. The separation of interlocutors and the loss of communicative cues that are invaluable perceptual material are diminished. Furthermore, information is often reproduced for mass distribution, where each message is a copy. The lack of human presence facilitates impoverished engagement. The holistic quality of engagement and commitment in embodied communication is reduced in information. Mediated communication may facilitate a lack of engagement or commitment because intentionality is diminished if not undermined. Instead of direct intentional interaction with the world, media provide an inferior proxy that invite reciprocally weak engagement. Likewise, disembodied media are architecturally structured for spectatorial consumption. The subject position offered is disembodied, and users are structured to watch and/or listen as spectators and audiences.

In addition to absence and rationality, information is characterized by action. Information is a form of communication suited, and regularly deployed, toward control. Mediated information limits reciprocity and interaction. As a means of action information transforms interaction into at best reaction. It reduces the relationship between communicants to that of subject and object, stimulus and response, or sender and receiver. And as the process of transmitting information always involves recording or reproducing, its production also produces the basis for monopolies that can enhance control (Peters, 2004; Innis, 1951/1995, 1950/2007). Information defies the communication ideal of the ritual construction, maintenance, and reform of a shared, intersubjective lifeworld. Information as action is instrumental, and more conducive to forms of domination than of liberty (Carey, 1989/2009; Innis, 1951/1995).

Information's media ideal is the textual form. Textualization comprises the general characteristics of disembodiment communication into formal properties. Texts are the formal productions of disembodiment, a reduction of embodied communication as an interactive process into disembodied products. With disembodied texts, communication becomes detached from its moorings in particular spatial, temporal and socio-cultural milieu—its contexts. The term context implies the holistic, embodied, spatial, temporal, and interactive dimensions, among others, that are sheered through disembodiment in the process of constructing and transmitting texts. Texts become more mobile, seemingly discrete, and mystical. As Innis (1950/2007) and Carey (1989/2009) detail, with space-binding media or communication as transmission, texts are often mobilized as a vehicle of horizontal spatial power. Texts facilitate mobility, but they are also productive of it in that they are conducive to psychic as well as physical mobility (Killmeier, 2005). Sundered from its unique presence in time and space, and its embodied communicants, texts convey discreteness—that communication can be reduced into bounded forms that are seemingly complete and separate.

And texts are also prerequisites, pretexts perhaps, for the mystifications of modernity. The distillation of embodied communication into a product cultivates fetishization. Karl Marx identified fetishization as the process whereby commodities become endowed with mystical qualities owing to social relations of production, abstracted markets, and the division of labor. Texts, like commodities (although the distinction is often unnecessary), can appear magical or mystical owing to their separations, mobility, and seeming discreteness.

While texts may be fetishized, they also may contribute to what Weber characterized as the disenchantment of the modern world. Rationalization, Weber argued, aided the displacement of “magical elements of thought,” in fields as varied as politics, economics, music, and religion (Gerth & Mills, 1958, p. 51). The rationalization of communication as texts likewise undermines and destroys the enchanting elements of ritual in embodied communication. This suggests ways of interpreting how media producers often labor to enchant based on an implicit understanding of disembodiment and disenchantment. Texts offer a pseudo-holism—the packaging of information as texts belies their partiality. The creation of the star system, as Benjamin (1968) noted with film, was an attempt to restore a simulacra of the aura, authenticity, or rit-

ual value of mechanically reproduced art. Advertising of commodities illustrates how products need to be made meaningful (Ewen, 1976/2001), and how consumption in advanced consumer societies needs vivification (Ritzer, 2005). The proliferation of media advertising, promotion, cross-promotion, and tie-ins, while certainly constituted by economic imperatives, is suggestive of the necessity of enchantment in modernity. And finally, the attempts to mimic interaction in disembodied texts—para-social interaction—can be read as an attempt at enchantment as well as a substitute for what is irrevocably lost (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Disembodiment, Power, and Modern Media

Disembodied practices in the form of the rationalization of communication are particularly evident in the relationship between power and disembodied media. This section assesses this relationship with the aid of Innis and Carey. Because communication media are reflexive, they work backward, becoming further constitutive over time. Metaphors and theories become models, which in turn become social practices, technological architectures, and political-economic canalizations, and vice versa (Carey, 1989/2009). A metaphoric/theoretic disembodiment that becomes operational in practice, and vice versa, characterizes theory, praxis, and power.

Modernity exhibits a shift in consideration of people as embodied parts of a social order, to conceiving of society as a body via organismic metaphors through the lens of science and rationalization. Pre-modern writers and visual artists anthropomorphized society as the human body—the ruler as head, parliament as heart, judges as eyes, ears and tongue, and peasant classes as the feet (de Botton, 2004). Society was a body in which each social order served a specialized and integral role. Beginning in the 19th century, social and political theorists, influenced by Herbert Spencer's social science, began to conceive of society in organismic terms. Communications and transportation were conceived as arteries and nerves (Carey, 1989/2009), and people were configured as cells in the social organism (Hardt, 2001). New media following the telegraph, such as the camera, phonograph, and telephone, were theoretically and practically modeled on the physiology of human sense organs (Peters, 2004). Although modeled on parts of the body, these modern media were created as abstract technical processes. They were disembodied in that neither content nor social use was considered in their initial development (Williams, 1976).

The media ecology of Harold Innis and James W. Carey implicitly acknowledge disembodiment in modern media; however, neither addresses its significance. I will flesh out the latent consideration of disembodiment in their work after a brief sketch of their chief concepts. Innis's communication theory of history innovated the idea of medium-bias. Communication media have inherent biases that impact the societies in which they are developed and used, and vice versa. Time-binding media, such as the manuscript book and oral forms of communication facilitate the preservation of societies in terms of history, continuity, and permanence (Innis, 1951/1995). Space-binding media such as the printed book and radio and television broadcasting, are conducive of centralization, control, and standardization. A balance between time and

space-binding media contribute to historically stable societies. Beginning in modernity, Western societies have privileged space-binding media to the detriment of time-binding media. Emphasizing territorial expansion and control and neglecting temporal continuity has resulted in instability and tendencies toward empire. Innis was an important influence on Carey.

Carey emphasizes how the preponderance of space-binding media in the modern period are constitutive with communication as transmission. Transmission is “messages transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people” (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 13). Corresponding to Innis’s time-binding media, Carey advances another conception of communication, ritual. Ritual contrasts with transmission, it “is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (p. 15).

Carey and Innis’s work are suggestive of the value of accounting for the body as a medium in media ecology because they account for intentionality in the modern media. In attending to how media are organized and to what intentions, as well as their formal biases, Carey and Innis insist upon considering how media are bound up with the power of their architects and producers. Their work calls upon us to weigh how particular media are organized, deployed, and interwoven with power. Indeed, power is an important bias of media, as the intention of a communication system is inseparable from its use. For example, reading as a public practice interwoven with public discussion and argument evolved into a communication system of private reading and reading audiences (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 127). To understand this evolution one needs not only to consider the spatial bias of print but that of power as well: a privatized bias (p. 127).

While disembodied communication’s extensive capacity is the primary focus of Innis (1951/1995, 1950/2007), its intensive capacity is considered in Carey’s (1989/2009) work. In essays on the telegraph, Innis, and the future, Carey plumbs the Janus-face of space-binding media, examining how they can be deployed intensively within the nation-state to bind the periphery to the center, and to circumvent the rising economic prospects of other cities. This intensive character of disembodied communication is both deeper and broader. Disembodiment is an integral part of the shift to a modern society—a society predicated in part on new horizontal spatio-temporal relations that make people both a mass and individuals. Modern society both extends the “imagined community” greatly in space, encompassing and intensively cultivating a new socio-political identity: the individual (Andersen, 1991). It is a society created out of revolutions—political, economic, scientific, philosophical, industrial, transportation, and communications. These revolutions broke down the old social order and begin to construct a new reality.

The extensive capacity of disembodied communication facilitates the broader horizontal relations of modern society, but disembodied communication also works intensively, facilitating the diminution of vertical relations of place. Place is material and embodied. The relations of place—the spatio-temporal and social order constitut-

ing the pre-modern lifeworld—are supplemented and eventually supplanted by relations of space. There arose “communities of space: communities that were not in place but in space, mobile connected over vast distances by appropriate symbols, forms, and interests” (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 123). Relations of place and the identities associated with them are revolutionized in part via relations of space and the new reality of society. Increases in texts and their circulation, owing to mechanized printing and advances in transportation, facilitate relations of space and concomitant identities—people increasingly participate in mass rituals of newspaper and vernacular literature consumption and become individuals, citizens, and workers (Andersen, 1991). People become free of vertical relations of place with fixed, temporally transcendent identities, while gradually becoming bound to horizontal relations of space with malleable, temporary identities. They become individuals who are freer of vertical power, but increasingly subject to the abstract, rationalized forms of horizontal power. Disembodied communication as a means of power, both decentralizes and recentralizes in the transition to modernity. Initially a means of liberation, it eventually becomes one of domination.

One way that disembodied communication works intensively is to facilitate atomization. The collective, common, and community of the relations of place were undermined and the individual subject sundered from them. This contributes to the status of the modern individual as cell in the organismic society, a society Spencer described as a collection of individuals. The early modern connotation of the individual was indivisible in terms of rights, and as a single example of a group, unique but connected (Williams, 1976). The individual derived his or her identities, rights, responsibilities, work roles, etc., from the group. This is individuality. The 18th century political-economic and social theory shifted this connotation toward individualism, whereby the individual becomes “a fundamental order of being” (p. 135). The group, in this view, derives its identity from the individual. The elevation of individualism and its emphasis on the alleged separations between individuals and groups, and the causal dependency of the latter on the former, encapsulates atomization.

Although a great number of legal, political-economic, social, and cultural phenomena contribute to atomization, disembodied modern communication is fundamental. The separation of communication from an intersubjective, reciprocal practice to a rationalized, disembodied one is primary to facilitating a conception of individualism as atomization. The solitary, privatized practices of reading, and later listening and watching, cultivate spectatorial knowledge and a formal sense of disconnection from others. And disembodiment abets the increasing physical, social, and psychic atomization. Disembodied communication media dialectically constitute the “separation from and integration into” the lifeworld, facilitating a powerful liminal space and psychic place, a modern limbo (Spigel, 2001, p. 32).

The dialectical relationship between atomization and spatialized integration with others is revelatory of disembodied communication as a form of power. The disruptions of the modern world are brought to one’s awareness by space-binding media, but the atomization they aid in cultivating structure a sense of spectatorial impoten-

cy. Media as symbolic communication are means of producing, maintaining, repairing, and transforming reality, but they are just as, if not more so, instrumental in reproducing it (Carey, 1989/2009, p. 19). News media can be used to convey a strong sense of a common culture and world. But as disembodied communication they militate against the reciprocal, intersubjective commons. Media forms such as the car radio can likewise facilitate a sense of connection otherwise absent in the daily life of long-distance commuters, while simultaneously reinforcing the atomization they ostensibly ameliorate (Killmeier, 2005). The sentiments and opinions of individuals can be collected, aggregated, and disseminated via media, but public opinion or taste trends can become tyrannical social facts. What Heidegger (1996) aptly termed the “they”—the anonymous force that we regularly defer to—wield a great deal of power in integrating us separately. We become separated from others, who become increasingly anonymous strangers, the “they” we are increasingly integrated into, which functions as a powerful form of social control via “the synchronic grammars of the administered life” (Crowley, 1981, p. 237).

Considered formally, disembodied communication as space-binding media facilitate standardization and leveling. Standardization is based in both the technological and political-economic bases of space-binding media. They are architecturally and economically rationalized for rapid transmission and exchange. Efficient and rapid exchange necessitates standardized texts that are interchangeable. If texts are interchangeable, without substantive distinction, context is made further irrelevant as it is only germane to unique things. And they are leveling in the sense that their horizontal trajectory works to make standard, through the reduction of vertical distinction, in spaces of exchange. It levels the diversity of human existence to mechanical, technological, and capitalist parameters. If the medium is the message, per McLuhan, then one fundamental impact of disembodied communication as a form of power lies in its tendencies to standardize and level. I am not suggesting media forms and content determine consumption. Rather, in cultivating us as atomized spectatorial consumers of texts, and helping to diminish embodied, intersubjective communication, they aid in maintaining our separate integration. Both Innis and Carey note that modern media make communication more difficult. Communication is hobbled through disembodiment, but we collectively share the same problem. Misery loves company. Media are means of integration and separation. That is their message.

Conclusion

I have argued that media ecology needs to attend to the body as a medium through and with which we use all other media. This is an imperative problem because modern media disembody through the diminution or elimination of our most radical medium. In support of this argument I offered an historical assessment of how disembodiment grounds theories and practices of modern media. Furthermore, I considered the mutual constitution of disembodied communication, knowledge and power, how the separation of and integration into the world facilitated by disembodied communication works to cultivate increasing atomization. And I suggested,

through engaging the work of Innis and Carey, how media ecology can benefit from exploring this virtually untouched frontier.

Communication scholars, and media ecologists in particular, often explore how communication media materially embody expression. I contend we need to devote vigorous attention to the relatively unexplored phenomenon of material disembodiment in modern communication media. The body is the existential medium, the radical standpoint each of us inhabits. It is our primary means of expression, perception, consciousness, and subjectivity. I suspect each of us devotes a good deal of time, effort, and money to care for, groom, and adorn our bodies. I therefore suspect most of us are reflexively aware of our bodies as communicating something about us to others, as a non-verbal medium. I suggest that we consider how our bodies are a much more sophisticated and generative medium, and how they impact and are affected by their communicative environments.

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