

First ISA Forum of Sociology
Sociological Research and Public Debate
Barcelona, Spain
September 5 - 8, 2008

Working Group on
'THE BODY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES'

Main theme:

Mapping the Body: The bodily Factor in Memory and social Action

CALL FOR PAPERS

The body is part and parcel of the sociological enterprise.

The *Homo sapiens*'s cultural history demonstrates that the contribution the body makes to the brain is not limited to supporting vital operations, but includes regulating the space and time which organizes the contents of a normal mind. This fundamental property enables our 'mental ship' to produce the sequences of movements and events which organize the topographical mapping of bodily experience.

The somato-sensory mass of the brain (Damasio, 2004:314) builds up the connections which the body's confines compound with the environment by means of neural activity maps coordinated in time. Lacking this mechanism, we would not be able to locate our interactions with the environment or even less, utilize, in the present, the store of knowledge acquired by our bodies by touching an object, looking at a view or moving in space along a path that our bodies describe by moving. We have ancient and genetically pre-arranged circuits which regulate the body's functions, controlling the endocrine, immunity and internal organ systems and activating impulses and instincts. Taking root is the basis of our way of acquiring knowledge. This insistence on the mind being rooted in the body as a critical factor, brings to mind the need to pay attention to the real development of our brains in the connections in which it is 'tied' to the technological.

All the technical resources of human inventive capacity, from the chipped flints of the Neolithic Age to the Renaissance, emerge out of the relations between bodies, technologies and emotional life.

The invention and proliferation of microelectronic technologies and the rapid pace of their constant development and application – mostly in the developed world – introduced today a new phase not only in the role of technologies in human's life but also brought about serious consequences for almost all aspects of the individual's life and social relations. We refer to those technologies that are now fully integrated into, and an unremarkable part of, everyday life. It also deeply effects the human body. The physical world and electronic virtual world are not separate, as much current discussions might lead one to believe; in fact they are intricately intertwined.

The present call for papers faces up to the links between social constructions of the human body and the growth of completely, immersive realities (known as Virtual Reality or VR) constructed through computer software. Human bodies form a basis for social relationships. Although a VE (virtual environment) minimizes ambulatory experience, users interacting with virtual technologies nonetheless constitute material phenomena engaged in practices. For example, users wearing Head Mounted Displays (HMDs) confirm a sense that technologies such as VR are able to obtain a grip on human bodies.

We have now a new economy of presence- within which we continually choose among the possibilities of synchronous and asynchronous communication, presence and virtual presence. Therefore we need to consider the roles of virtual places as well as physical ones, of electronic connections as well as asynchronous encounters and transactions in addition to synchronous ones.

The Program of the WG03 'The Body in the Social Sciences' at the first Barcelona Forum of Sociology (5-8 September, 2008) is aimed to analyzing the complex interaction between the material and immaterial aspects of electronic technologies shaping today the 'digital mind' by considering the body as the crucial factor making up the relations between humans, technologies and affective life.

The sorts of questions that this call addresses here include: How do technologies and the body contribute to the social, while being themselves heterogeneous? What are the sorts of relations into which these social, technological and bodily entities enter? Can we draw boundaries and borders around or through a nexus of relations in order to identify particular heterogeneous bodies, and what might such an identification offer us analytically?

The sessions organized by the Working Group 03 'The Body in the Social Sciences' will provide opportunities to elaborate an innovative methodological framework tracing the ways in which the bodies and technologies interweave in the interfaces between off and on line.

Particularly welcome are papers aimed to analyze the 'state of the art' in body-computer interaction and papers on the processing of memory by multiple-tasking performances.

The following areas of discussion have been identified, but further suggestions are welcome:

1. THE BIOLOGICAL BASIS FOR MIND-BODY INTERACTION
2. BODY MAPPING AS AN INTERACTIVE CREATION OF SPATIAL KNOWLEDGE;
3. THE BODY AS CRUCIAL FACTOR IN MEMORY PROCESSING;
4. 'DOMESTICATING' TECHNOLOGIES: IDENTITIES, EMBODIMENT AND DIGITAL MEMORIES;
5. DISTRIBUTED MAPPING ON CYBERSPACE;
6. ICTs INTERFACES AS BOUNDARY OF SOCIAL PRESENCE;
7. THE CYBORG CITIZEN;
8. 'HOW MULTITASKING AFFECTS HUMAN LEARNING';
9. USER IMPACT OF 'AFFECTIVE' COMPUTER'.

Proposals (1 page max.) should be sent to BIANCA MARIA PIRANI, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION, VIA SALARIA 113, 00198 ROMA (ITALY)

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The deadline for submission of abstracts is December 31, 2007.