

Embodied Politics: Audiovisual Media and the New Publics

The “somatic turn” of the 1990s in media and cultural studies enabled a systematic consideration of the affective dimensions of human perception beyond cognitive processes and narrative patterning. At the same time, phenomenological characterizations reintroduced a pre-discursive notion of the subject and culminated in an introspective and unworldly description of film experience as a form of “self-touching” (Vivian Sobchack). Countering the double tendency towards an innocent and detached body, my talk argues for a concept of embodiment that transcends the opposition between the lived body and the mechanical machine. I understand the human body as an entity that is both spontaneously lived and at the same time constituted by the discursive machinery of the social. In this context, film experience may function as a model of embodiment, which highlights the temporary suspension of the coercion of identity. Secondly, I want to propose an alternative to subjectivism by reevaluating the phenomenological notion of life-world. This concept does not simply refer to the prior sphere of lived experience but rather to an inherent relationship of tension: to a conflict between the intimate processes of one’s own mortal body on the one hand, and the requirements of the societal and public sphere, on the other. Drawing on the post-phenomenological political theories of Hannah Arendt, Judith Butler and Marina Garcés, the productive tension between life and world might offer an understanding of politics as embodied and collectively shared practice that finds its expression in the recent occupations of public squares and their complementary web 2.0-networks and imagery.

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