

Insects and Media

INTERVIEW Jussi Parikka

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You say media should no longer be considered as an extension of the body but of »Umwelt«. So in the sense of Uexküll and the term of Dawkins we could focus on ubiquitous media as an extended phenotype. This ongoing »genesis of form« creates new environmental assemblages and artificial affect zones. How can we describe these new entanglements?

Marshall McLuhan's phrasing media as extensions of Man, the human body, needs to be broadened – actually radically broadened. I am interested in the wider mobilization of planetary resources as part of contemporary media technological culture. And in my book *Insect Media*, I show that not merely the human body but the animal body is in a central position considering the models, design and concepts of contemporary technology. I see Dawkin's extended phenotype as an unhistorical model for technological development; I do the contrary, I try to historicise. Expanding on Uexküll's notion of Umwelt is a more important way in terms of thinking, indeed, media less as tools or artifacts, and more comprehensively as a milieu in which we are coordinated to perceive, move and practice cognitive functions in particular ways, in particular relations.

The function according to Uexküll and the affect according to Deleuze revert the vector from the subject to the object, from the inside to the outside. The Umwelt is creating an irrepressible flow of affects and percepts.

In a way the focus on affect even goes past subject and object – it is not object-oriented, but a milieu-relationship, something I elaborate on in *Insect Media*. Media becomes an atmospheric network of tensions between points and counterpoints that are defined by their dynamic relationships. This pertains to those microclimates of sounds, of moods too – this ephemeral but completely real sensorial milieu in which we also are involved.

In fact, the dichotomy of inside-outside does no longer work. At least we need an arrow in two directions like Michel Serres proposes in the »Parasite«. How can animal studies help to get a better understanding of structural coupling with our extended mind? How do affective rhythms among bodies and their environment, between hosts and parasites, do change in the age of Insect media?

Indeed – the inside and outside become defined less as separate entities, and instead by way of a fold or perhaps by way of the milieu in which sensation happens. Serres is one of the best

thinkers in terms of the complexity of relations defined by the primacy of the relational, the parasite, the third term. With the lineage of Uexküll and others, we get a sense of a dynamic milieu, even a rhythmic one, which defines bodies. The question of the extended mind needs perhaps to be posed not only in terms of what is our extended mind – but what other extended minds are there in the world. We are not the only organism that »thinks« despite our anthropocentric assumptions; the world thinks in multiple ways, not all of them by way of consciousness – as a matter of fact, even our thinking is not that conscious as we sometimes lead ourselves to believe!

Rob Coley and Dean Lockwood are developing the concept of the »Parasite Regime«. They write: »It's Capital that is the monster, we are the parasites. We are lodged within the cramped cavities of it's body, the coils of it's guts.« The networked body of the social, as they say, feeds off the monstrous body of the capital while it, in turn, is nourished by that very body of the collective. Coley and Lockwood conclude with the metaphor: »We are in the cloud and the cloud is in us«. How does the »Parasite Regime« relate to »Insect Media«?

In *Digital Contagions*, a book that precedes *Insect Media*, I pitch the idea of »viral capitalism«. It relates to the parasitical powers of capitalism as an engine of adaptation, a power of de- and reterritorialisation that is able to attach to a variety of social processes some of which even seem contradictory to capitalism. Viral capitalism relates to a priming of affective states and environments too. It can be said to express itself as a power of attracting and fine-tuning; this is the power of the affect to draw us in to certain situations and to parasitize on the social relations.

As for the cloud, my understanding relates to the concrete ecological arrangements in which the illusion of the cloud persists; instead of the cloud, we have a massive planetary infrastructural arrangement of data and energy, of transmission and storage. This relates to both concrete ecology (energy demands) and political economy (placement, control, ownership of the sites of data). Of course, the discourse of ubiquitous information environments corresponds to what Coley and Lockwood pitch here through that idea of us in the cloud, the cloud in us.

