

How do the materials of the world shape people?

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If we want to consider properly how materials of the world may shape people in quantifiable ways, one would think an Anthropologist would consider he would be best served by observing people's own description of how they view their material surrounding in contrast to how they actually interact with it. Homo Sapiens definitely rely on some level of physical sustenance in food, water, sunlight to a large degree for vitamin D etc. but how can one investigate the further extent of influence the environment would have? Different ethnographic groups have different cosmologies and relational lifestyles to the environment – for example some would see their surrounding environment i.e. 'nature' and their own culture as synonymous in reality, as opposed to humanity and culture being separate from it. The Mbuti would be a good example of this (Ingold, 2000).

There are increasingly many different paradigms of thinking about materials. Scientific evidence does indicate that Homo Sapiens descended from evolutionary lineages like all other biological organisms and likewise, it follows logically that the cognitive abilities of our brains are no different. Information like this means that some paradigms of thought are increasingly unorthodox. At the dawn of the 21st century there was an emerging cohort of 'multispecies ethnographers' who began to place a fresh emphasis on the subjectivity and agency of organisms whose lives are entangled with humans (Helmreich & Kirksey, 2010, pp. 545-576). Helmreich & Kirksey also suggest multispecies ethnography was a case of the boundaries between traditionally separate fields such as environmental studies, science and technology studies (STS), and animal studies being blurred and data and fieldwork from all domains being used to understand how as Michael Pollan suggests in his work *The Botany of Desire: a plant's eye view of the world* if people are part of the 'co-evolutionary bargain' that other beings are part of and are evolutionary history would have been influenced and controlled by the elements of the environment we relied upon (i.e. plants) (2010, pp. 545-576) (2003). A more radical paradigm would be that of the new-materialists, a term coined in the 1990s to describe a theoretical turn away from the persistent dualisms in modern and humanist traditions whose influences are present in much of cultural theory (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 48). It instead posits to examine human beings as material individuals and indeed a materially constantly changing being - new materialism thus shares an agenda with posthumanism in that they seek a repositioning of the human among nonhuman actants, they question the stability of an individuated, liberal subject (Sanzo, 2019)

Something to be kept in mind however is how a view of the material world can be linked to how people interact with it. For instance, Yuval Noah Harari shows how that animistic religions started to die off (which saw animals as equals to humanity within the cosmos) to be replaced by theistic religions which saw mankind as separate and above nature (Harari, 2015, p. 105-107) when human's turned to agriculture and domesticated animals for their uses. It involved them often separating the young animals from their mothers to be able to milk the mother cows for instance. Human farmers were aware of the emotional trauma that is inflicted upon the young and the mothers due to emotional needs within the livestock not being met (that they didn't know was caused by evolutionary pressure) (Harari, 2015, p. 92-107), but the cosmology would perhaps help them reconcile their behaviour with a positive self-image.

Another thing to consider is what a person generally experiences in life might shape his expectations for the future. As of today, millions of humans around the world who spend their lives living in

modern urbanised environments are still reliant upon the work of agriculture, horticulture and meat farming for food. Yet how much would the average human in modern, urbanised environment understand about ecology and how humans use it in their favour for effective production of food. Many humans do not actually understand and comprehend all the features of the environment that directly impact their lifestyle – even significant or crucial influence such as the production of their food. This is actually one of the basic elements of survival among humanity, as food is an essential human need, and how it is produced actually determines what kind of lifestyle humans can live – whether it is one of constant labour or one where humans can use their time to other pursuits. In this case, the effect of the environment may not only dissociate the thoughts of food production, but also distract the mind with newer concerns (i.e. social media, entertainment, technological production). For example, modern societies being accustomed to simply collecting food from supermarkets means that they increasingly fail to appreciate how important and precious food is, as they are divorced from the daily process of growing it themselves. This disconnect may be the reason despite the fact that the food and knowledge of healthy eating that is available to modern societies, many urban areas are facing dangerously high rates of obesity – 2.1 billion people were overweight in 2014, and by 2030 half of humankind is expected to be overweight by 2030 (McKinsey & Company, 2019).

Thus, in conclusion, how people try to understand and deal with the material needs does significantly determine the type of relationship they have with their environment. And perhaps the new paradigms for thinking about how we as humans interact with the world, even if they originate from academia, may not be free from bias due to the environmental influences effected upon the researchers.

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