BOOK REVIEWS

Kristina Höök. *Designing with the Body: Somaesthetic Interaction Design*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2018. xxxiii+237 pages. ISBN 9780262038560. Hardcover $30.00 (£25.00).

I started to read *Designing with the Body* in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. My mind was distracted by the global crisis and the accompanying pandemonium. Our "lifeworlds" (experiences of reality in our day-to-day lives) had radically changed from interacting face to face to relating as objects mirrored in Zoom space—as disembodied, impersonal videos in a computer or smartphone camera. For the most part, we saw people in the flesh at a distance and interacted with them through large plastic barriers and facial coverings revealing only eyes. A new culture developed of isolation, distance, and impersonal interaction through technology. We lived as if experiencing the world from a removed, depersonalized point of view: a world where abstract virtuality became our reality.

In assessing this context of abstract virtuality, the questions and discussion in Kristina Höök's book are of more importance and urgency for us now in the immediacy of our presence that is removed from concrete reality than when she first envisioned her project. I will briefly outline her book before plunging into a more detailed discussion.

How can we develop designs for technology in the Internet of Things, for wearables, for processor-embedded or app-aware appliances, for furniture, for lights, or for cushions and mats? More generally, how can we develop designs for technologies that not only fit humans but also help individuals, society, and institutions to improve? The book answers that we must start from the body ("soma") in unity with the mind holistically, from the inside, from one's own subjective or first-person experience. Too much design is oriented towards a cognitivist, symbolic, linguistic, objective third-person point of view. However, Höök argues that although we cannot get away from language and its embedded third-person point of view in the articulation of our subjective, first-person point of view, we need to acknowledge and use our subjective first-person experience with technologies. Furthermore, she argues that we use the tacit knowledge we acquire when we interact with technologies as primarily active and experiential beings within our "lifeworlds," or sociocultural and sociotechnical eco-niches. The use of tacit knowledge is necessary for developing designs. "Tacit knowledge," Höök writes, "is and will continue to be part of the bodily, emotional, and subjective aesthetic experiences" (202). For that matter, tacit knowledge is used in all creative endeavours.

Tacit knowledge links the subjective to the objective. It is bi-directional, or two-dimensional. The articulated objective design points inward to the tacit knowledge used in the subjective, first-person dimension of the creation and appreciation of that design. The inner, unarticulated and pre-articulated subjective experience of tacit knowledge points outward to articulation in words, symbol systems (such as sketches or pictorial designs), and physical objects in the world for use by people. Objects designed from a base within the first-person subjective experience of the designer(s) could help people, as users of and interactors with the object, become aware of themselves through the emotions and thoughts evoked in the use of the physical

object, not only as a means to an end but also as an aesthetic experience ("soma-aesthetic" experience).

Höök and her design team developed prototype processor-based technologies that interact with body heat, breath, and small and slow body movements of the user that attempt to assist the user to become bodily aware. Höök's design philosophy becomes materialized and socialized in the physical objects that she and her design lab team not merely design but also build (see chapter 4, "Soma Mat, Breathing Light, and Sarka: An Autobiographical Design Account," 83–115). Höök provides a succinct outline of her philosophical approach to design and, for that matter, to everything: "… what are the best practices for learning about and changing yourself? ….[A new interactive processor-embedded technology]…needs to be grounded in knowledge of bodily processes, engaging your senses and attention to help you turn inward and learn something about yourself, even changing yourself. Where would you start?" (83–84). Good question. Where does one start in developing technologies that actually help us learn about ourselves from the inside out? Rather than use the customary procedure of looking at ourselves from the third-person point of view, as if we were data in a graph or variables in mathematical game-theoretic and micro-economic rational choice functions, we might start designing technologies within the first-person stance. Start with yourself, Höök suggests. Your inner experiences and self-awareness can help develop technologies that actually offer feedback into your inner experiences and improve your self-awareness of your inner world.

From this point forward, I adopt the first-person subjective experience as a "proof-of-concept" of Höök's general philosophy (as well as her philosophy of design). However, I face a dilemma in attempting to adopt the first-person stance: how, in a world where we are in a matrix of illusory, virtual objects—these days more than ever before—can we relate to those objects from a first-person point of view? We are now disembodied beings, barely living in our own bodies.

I will describe how I worked with adopting the first-person stance in reading Höök's book and writing this review. To get inside my body, to experience what Höök advocates for the best design, I first decided to practice slow movement by following practitioners of Qigong (or Shibashi 18) on YouTube. In announcing what the slide displayed at the beginning of a session of Qigong, one practitioner said to follow along as if following the movement in a mirror. This immediately objectified me as the practitioner. I imitated as best as I could what I saw on the screen, tried to follow what I heard in the voiceover instructions, and attempted to read and remember the quickly disappearing names for each of the slow movements. At best, I gave full attention to what I saw, heard, and felt as I mimicked the movements of the two-dimensional image on the computer screen.

Following Höök's advocacy for slow thought, I practiced slow reading and slow reflection about what I was reading. But as Höök admits, reading, talking, and even thinking or cognition involve the use of objectifying language. Though we may stretch language to describe new inner experiences, even with new metaphors and new phraseology we objectify our new subjective awareness. There seems to be nothing else that we can do. As the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said, there is no private language. According to Höök, however, "*soma-based design entails a qualitative shift from a predominantly symbolic, language-oriented stance to an experiential, felt, aesthetic stance permeating the whole design and use cycle*" (175, italics in original). I put aside critical reactions, though I was aware of them—such as it doesn't matter how we come up with an idea, a design, an architecture, a blueprint, a drawing, a cartoon; what matters is whether it's any good. Indeed, that is the basic question one has: is the book, movie, theory any good? The evaluation of a book, theory, design based on its psycho-socio-historico origin

has been dubbed the "genetic fallacy." So my critical mind, objectifying as all criticism is, wondered whether Höök was committing the genetic fallacy with respect to design. Suppose a design is just a variation of a traditional design and does not originate from first-person experience. Suppose the design is a third-person modification of a design done in a generic style, or genre. The outcome, the design, can have value with respect to the value system adopted by those who appreciate the style and genre of similar but different designs. It can be good and liked by some people in a specific group, audience, or market.

My point is that from within the I-experience, within the first-person self-aware experience, one acknowledges when one jumps out of the I-experience and moves into the third-person, objectifying experience of whatever, as an It-experience. The critical stance, one that I seem to flip into as a habitual critical thinker, even in my deepest moments of reading from the stance of the first-person, is in a sense alien to the first-person experience. In the critical stance, one objectifies everything and deploys the "*predominantly symbolic, language-oriented stance to an experiential, felt, aesthetic stance….*"

I put aside those critical moments, but I experienced them. So, continuing with my dilemma, I wanted to adopt a first-person experience in reading this book and in writing this review as a unified, singular person with mind and body subjectively experienced in a unitary fashion. However, in the global lifeworld of isolationism in the pandemic, the only contact with others was I-IT in the global matrix of virtuality, intruded, interrupted, and disrupted. In the symbolic-oriented matrix of virtuality, where everyone is compelled to adopt a third-person stance in order to connect with others, an attempt to adopt a first-person stance goes against what seems to be a compulsory or, at best, a natural standpoint. It seems that even now my first-person frame of reference is continuously bombarded by the nonstop droning, screeching noise from the third-person, disembodied shouts of the ephemera in the current world of virtuality. Even the now customary flash of thought, the tweet, the post, is expressed in flash-by words and images streaming on a screen, transient though externalized. Once saved in a file, the transient words flash up on the screen as virtual objects. Once the file is sent through the internet, the words in the file can only be read in the third-person stance, in the abstract digital medium of pixels on a screen. The thoughts expressed in and through the words are objectified by the third-person who cannot have a real first-person, face-to-face, I-Thou interaction with the writer and issuer of the words. Can one say the same about words printed in a book? Do words in print exclude a first-person experience of the book, and do they exclude an I-Thou relationship with the author of the book?

Socrates complained about writing freezing thoughts as opposed to thoughts developing, evolving, and even improving within face-to-face speech. When thought is frozen on the printed page, authors are prevented from changing their minds. In face-to-face interaction, one can immediately change one's mind, trying out and trying on different thoughts and alternative points of view. Language as living speech is not objectified. Speech in face-to-face interaction connects people, not as an intermediary object but as a means for relating people through their words, facial expressions, body language, and, often, with respectful physical contact such as a hand on a shoulder or a pat on an arm. However, in nearly total virtuality during the height of the pandemic, thoughts were both objectified and transient. Language disappeared with the flow of pixels on the screen, but speech as objectified on the screen became externalized and even alien to the originator of the words saved into a digital file, transmitted through the internet, and appearing digitally in the pixels. The written words became alien as another object, not frozen but as disappearing objects flying by on the screen as one

scrolled the screen pages. Moreover, the meaning dissolved through the utter objectivity of language as pure syntax and as a product of objective algorithms that govern software applications, the apps loaded into the memory of the device.

One can rightly comment that a dilemma arises when we attempt to use the first-person stance in our daily lives and activities that include the use of computer technologies. The first-person stance is often countered and subverted. Computer technologies inherently compel us to adopt the third-person stance. Hence, the matrix of almost total virtuality in our use and reliance on computer technologies for connecting with other people preexisted the isolationism created to avoid the extremes of the pandemic. The lifeworld, distorted by the pandemic in which the globe is still immersed, shifts the dilemma of the matrix of virtuality in confrontation with the subjectivity of the first-person experience, moving it from the background into the foreground and forefront of consciousness. Höök has a reply to my critical self in chapter 8, "The Politics of the Body" (177–195), and chapter 9, "A Soma Design Manifesto" (197–208). There is a way through the dilemma in the I-experience of her thought as an expression of her book.

What is this thought as an expression of a book? How can thought be other than objectified when articulated in a book? When articulating their thought in a book, how can an author avoid becoming objectified as the text and the thought in the text are objectified?

Thought as an expression of the book is similar to the thoughts and feelings of a person that are evident in facial expressions, body language, and carriage of the body in movement. In the global lifeworld of the matrix of virtuality, the first-person experience has now become a form of resistance. The first-person stance resists the domination of the use of third-person symbolic systems as objects in themselves rather than as media for expressing thought and for representing worlds as environments that we inhabit. These third-person symbolic systems objectify subjective experience and inner awareness. The third-person stance ignores and side-steps reflective thought in meditation.

How can we regain our experience as humans, each with our own subjectivity in the inner and pre-articulate world, in the face of domination by abstract, impersonal symbols and artifacts—especially computer technologies—with alien procedures and processes? The short version of the answer, according to Höök's general philosophy, is that while everything that is us, that makes us human, is now compelled to inhabit the matrix of virtuality, we can resist inhabiting that matrix by living through and with the first-person, I-experience. But one may justly wonder, as I have done and admitted in the above, whether there is a constant flip-flop between the first-person stance in our immersion in the reading of a book and in the writing about it. The question is, apart from the use of language and computer technologies, when one reflects in thought and writing about the flip-flop between the first-person and third-person stance, is one inevitably drawn into the third-person person stance? Even apart from the use of language and symbolic-oriented technologies, is not the very attempt to reflect and critically examine one's experience with adopting the first-person stance actually a flip into the third-person stance? Is not the very attempt to reflect and critically examine one's experience in "designing with the body," as Höök has described in her book, a flip into the third-person stance?

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