

*Incorporating Technology:
A Phenomenological Approach
to the Study of Artefacts and the
Popular Resistance to E-reading*

Submitted by Matt Hayler, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English, September 2011.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

(Signature)

Abstract

This thesis considers the phenomenological experience of e-reading (reading on an electronic screen) as a way-in to discussing wider issues of technology and our encounter with objects in our environments. By considering the resistance shown toward reading on iPads and Kindles in popular and academic discourse as a source of valuable “folk phenomenological” report, this thesis hopes to shed light on both the particular engagement of portable e-reading and the general experience of embodied encounters with artefacts.

The first chapter will consider the shortcomings of contemporary definitions of technology and aims to provide its own definition commensurate to the task of describing the intimate and very human encounter with equipment, an encounter which will be described as “technological.”

In the second chapter an ontology (begun in the background of the first) will be developed which primarily considers our encounter with things that are as embodied as ourselves. This ontology sees evolution as an epistemological concern, with every evolutionary act occurring as a response to environmental pressures and producing a knowledge of that environment. This knowledge, it will be argued, in light of conclusions drawn from an engagement with Object Oriented Ontology, can be tested only via repeatable successful action with that which might be known. Such evolutionary concerns, it will be further argued, are equally applicable to our artefacts.

The third chapter will focus on metaphor and critical theory to consider how e-reading in particular might function as a material metaphor, enabling productive thought. It will conclude with readings of three texts which put the language of all three chapters to work.

This thesis draws on several fields, including Critical Theory, Cognitive Neuroscience, Evolutionary Epistemology, and Philosophy, the bringing together of which is intended to be of use to the still emerging Digital Humanities and the work's home discipline of English Studies as it gets used to the substantial alterations in the substrate of its object of study.

Table of Contents

Title Page	---	1
Abstract	---	2
Table of Contents	---	3
Introduction	---	4-24
Chapter 1 - The Tools of Our Nature	---	25-93
Chapter 2 - The Nature of Our Tools	---	94-167
Chapter 3 - Thinking Through Artefacts	---	168-253
Conclusion	---	254-259
Bibliography	---	260-293