

Virtual Communities Don't Exist:
Avoiding Digital Dualism in Studying
Collaboration

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the “real” and the “virtual”

DIGITAL DUALISM views the digital and physical as largely separate

AUGMENTED REALITY views them as highly enmeshed

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DIGITAL DUALISM prevalent in everyday conversations,
popular culture and academic research

THE MATRIX



versus

VIDEODROME



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Digital Dualism makes two errors

Disappears the role of the offline in the online
and the role of the online in the offline

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Towards a synthetic understanding of collaborations and organizations

Organization researchers especially attuned to a synthetic view, of how the online and offline interact

We suggest that this sort of simultaneous online/offline collaboration be described as “augmented collaboration”

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What are *AFFORDANCES*?

“Affordance refers to the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used... A chair affords (“is for”) support and, therefore, affords sitting.”

- Donald Norman, *The Design of Everyday Things*

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“Understanding ontology in terms of affordances thus bridges gaps that would otherwise leave room for questions of relative priority between epistemology and metaphysics. One cannot talk about affordances without talking about both metaphysics and epistemology at the same time (or alternately, at least).”

- John T. Sanders, “Affordances: An Ecological Approach to First Philosophy”

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“‘Materiality’ here refers to the features of a technological artifact—whether that artifact is a piece of hardware or software. In this formulation, materiality exists independent of people, but affordances do not.”

- Jeffrey W. Treem and Paul M. Leonardi, “Social Media Use in Organizations: Exploring the Affordances of Visibility, Editability, Persistence, and Association”

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Affordances are co-constituted

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Some affordances are more tightly
linked than others

body, desk, and chair
vs.
stop sign and spoon

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Affordances and Augmented Reality

The “offline” isn’t unmediated; all interaction is mediated

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“How, I asked myself, was it possible for someone... intelligence to believe that mind could be separated from body? Even assuming such a separation was possible, how could anyone think that consciousness in an entirely different medium would remain unchanged, as if it had no connection with embodiment?”

“for information to exist, it must always be instantiated in a medium”

- N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*

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If all interaction is mediated, then we must consider the affordances of offline modes of communication as well

An augmented perspective sees the affordances of online and offline interaction as tightly coupled

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Potential Implications for Social Media Collaboration/Organization Research

The affordances of any particular social media platform are influenced by the affordances of

- 1) other social media platforms
- 2) offline modes of collaboration

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Linked Affordances

Facebook message	email	handwritten letter
Google Documents	MS Word	typewriter
Facebook group	listserv	print memo
Google Hangouts	Skype	boardroom meeting
tweet	blog	suggestion box
instant message	sms	passing notes
Twitter backchannel	email	f2f conference
Spotify	iTunes	record player

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