

Mapping the Reservoirs of Media Ecology: A Review of Paolo Granata's Introduction to Media Ecology: Thinkers, Schools of Thought, Key Concepts

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Go to your browser. Bring up the graphic of M.C. Escher's incredible drawing, "Relativity." A myriad of staircases connects to innumerable landings, which lead to other staircases, all within a world that ceases to be reliably three-dimensional. Try to count how many dimensions Escher has suggested and invented.

Losing count, you will marvel. That is exactly the marvel I felt in reading Paolo Granata's newly published *Introduction to Media Ecology* – which creates a bridgework connecting more dimensions of thought than I, or any reader, could easily count.

Rightly, Granata seems hesitant to call Media Ecology an academic discipline. Media Ecology is emphatically not another splintered specialty in the ever-fracturing landscape of academic "subjects."

What to make of an area of investigation too innately inter-disciplinary to belong anywhere in the layout of burgeoning specialties? Indeed, as Professor Granata demonstrates in this riveting new book, the driving impulse of Media Ecology is to integrate media studies with a vast array of areas -- from Kinesics Anthropology to classic areas of philosophy ranging from Ontology to Epistemology; from Linguistics to Psycho-Historic studies; from medieval theology to German literary criticism.

The work is a mind-blowing tour through the new bridgework created by such innovative theorists as Neil Postman, Suzanne Langer, Walter Benjamin, Jacques Ellul, Walter Ong, Edward Sapir, Benjamin Whorf, Ted Carpenter, Jack Goody, Edward Hall, and too many others to list here.

At the center of it all, Granata focuses on the source of ideas that infiltrate and often – but not always – inspires the others: Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan.

Granata integrates a capsule biography with the thought of each figure. I found his treatments compellingly, fresh-eyed and vigorous. His sketches of three thinkers in particular -- Neil Postman, Jacques Ellul and Gregory Bateson -- were the finest accounts I'd ever read of any of these three.

Media Ecology was first announced as a distinctive territory deserving of study by Neil Postman in 1968. As Granata does a splendid job of stressing, the *raison d'être* of Media Ecology has always been to reach, explore, bridge and integrate.

From the beginning, Media Ecology's remit was precisely what Marshall McLuhan and Ted Carpenter launched in 1953, with the periodical that *New Explorations* reawakens and strives to continue: *Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communication*. Each original issue from the 1950s began with this disclaimer:

"We envision a series what will cut across the humanities and social sciences by treating them as a continuum. We believe anthropology and communication are approaches, not bodies of data, and that within each the four winds of the humanities, the physical, the biological and social science intermingle to form a science of man."

Searching out this "intermingled" world, as Paolo Granata brilliantly demonstrates in his *Introduction*, is the native purview of Media Ecology.

One figure not included in this sweeping assessment is the 44-year-old British artist and philosopher James Bridle (*New Dark Age, Ways of Being*). In *New Dark Age*, Bridle pleads for an education in "systemic literacy." Is this not another name for an education in Media Ecology?

Even as today's strong academic headwinds drive university professors toward ever-more splintered specialization, the watchword among Media Ecologists remains E.M. Forster's wise adage, "Only Connect".

Media Ecologists seek to approach intriguing questions not as fixed subjects, but as unrecognized dimensions, best explored by inventing fresh, encyclopedic bridgeworks. It's deeply instructive to note that of all the figures explored in Granata's text, not one of them made their way into his book by remaining in the field in which they had studied and earned their degrees. Harold Innis's launched on his career as an economic historian, Jacques Ellul as a theologian, Gregory Bateson as a geneticist. Bob Logan, editor of *New Exploration*, began as a physicist.

Welcome to a tour unlike any you'll find from Viking, Celebrity, or Oceana: a voyage that takes you through the thinking of the some of the most original, sweeping, and perspicacious minds of the mid- and late-20th century.

The book is currently best available at Amazon. Order up a copy. Read. Marvel.

Bill Kuhns