

In the Digital Mood

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In the Mood is a famous Glenn Miller instrumental song from the late 1930s. The song is jazzy and swingy, and you get in a dancing mood when you listen to it. It is generally accepted that music is a mood maker but how about digital media? That is the question that Richard Coyne, a professor at the University of Edinburgh, seeks to answer in his latest book *Mood and Mobility: Navigating the Emotional Spaces of Digital Social Networks*. Coyne has written several books on architecture but in this recent work Coyne focuses on the architecture of the Internet and how digital media affect people.

The book contains eleven chapters. The first chapter addresses the concept of mood. According to Coyne, mood is different from emotions and affects. This is not new knowledge. In psychology, the predominant discussions suggest a distinction between feelings with or without an object. Usually, mood is described as an emotion without an object, and

at the same time a state of mind that is either connected to cheerfulness or melancholy. Mood is less intense than emotions but lasts longer.

To Coyne, mood allows for interpretation in a broader sense. To date, media research has tended to neglect mood as an important part of what is going on around the screen. Coyne's key concern is to give the reader a more nuanced picture. People are not just passive receivers of moods. Mood is an emotion that is tied to agency; this also applies to digital media and technologies. With regard to digital media, there is pressure on people to buy and use technologies in everyday life. According to Coyne, this pressure requires mood management in order to handle the opportunities and challenges that we meet when we interact with each other. Coyne recognises that our everyday interactions are a matter of routines and habits. Nevertheless, Coyne's main argument through the book is that mood is an overlooked but important part of our everyday life with various digital technologies. Mood is likely to be privileged in relation to culture and language.

In the following ten chapters, Coyne discusses different kinds of mood topics. Every chapter includes arguments from research, historical and cultural events and everyday life situations. In an overall sense, the chapters seem to me to be forceful arguments for the diverse ways in which mood moves – motivating, activating, differentiating and strengthening the ways in which we interact with digital media in our everyday lives. In Coyne's view, "To focus on mood is to take a step back from instrumentality and function and to look at what prepares us for action in the first place" (8). A mood of, e.g., happiness or loneliness is already present when we interact with each other. Therefore, we have to take mood into account when we discuss digital media; we act with the media in a special mood. At the same time, Coyne claims, we are constantly – both mentally and physically – on the move. Mood and mobility are connected with each other in the sense that we are moving bodies with feelings. The point is that mood is an active but still constant condition that depends on context.

For example, Coyne draws attention to the collective aspect of moods in chapter 2, “Moved by the Mob” (43–67). In this chapter, he provides examples of how people interact with different technologies such as computer games and social media in a cultural and social way. In digital media, mood is a public process before it becomes an individual emotion, as Coyne argues. People are “attuned” (52) to be in a special mood. Other chapters address well-known issues of good moods, such as curiosity and pleasure. Coyne argues that curiosity and pleasure are interactional motivating moods. Further, he refers to haze as another moody word for atmosphere and ambience, he extends melancholy to a self-reflexive mood and a meta-mood that helps us to forget our sorrow, and he looks at colour contrast as a language of mood.

Among the extreme moods, Coyne discusses vertigo as an addiction. The theme of addiction is why the book caught my attention in the first place. In Coyne’s estimation, addiction is a loaded term which induces shame in those who are the bearers of the addiction stigma. I really like this chapter! It is full of unusual references to the addiction discussion. Maybe Coyne goes too far when his discussion of digital vertigo connects it to addiction. But to Coyne, vertigo is a symbol of human life, as we live our lives in the risk society. We have to feel a bit giddy all the time.

However, I believe that Coyne’s chapter 5, “Addicted to Vertigo”, brings new cultural perspectives to the discussion of addiction. I think that this issue definitely calls for further investigation. He argues for replacing the concept of addiction with the concept of habits. The Australian researcher Nicola Johnson (2009) touches on the same idea in her cycle of addiction. The terms of actions move from a ‘like’ to a ‘preference’, to a ‘habit’ that may become an ‘obsession’ and further on an ‘addiction’. Coyne approaches the subject in another way. Yet, as he states, we repeat our everyday routines in circles. The routines of using mobile telephones become a habit-forming experience but not in the addictive way.

In the beginning of Chapter 5, Coyne draws on Caillois' *Man, Play and Games* (1961). In this book, Caillois (1961) describes how children voluntarily seek a state of vertigo when they make a roundabout spin fast, even though vertigo makes them feel sick. According to Caillois, vertigo is a joyful experience that may cause an obsession or an addiction. Following Caillois, Coyne asserts that playing with digital technologies in modern society creates the same kind of conditions. Coyne's suggestion may seem a bit odd. Computer gaming is often a sedentary play activity without motion. But Coyne is referring to another kind of vertigo than that of Caillois. The addiction to vertigo refers to the feelings of thrill and anxiety when people play computer games. Computer gaming is an escape from what is considered as normal and it is a risk-taking activity that resonates good and bad moods.

Coyne investigates mood in an interdisciplinary way. He is inspired by experimental psychology, philosophy, phenomenology, cultural theory, and also architecture. Coyne's argumentation builds on different famous theorists such as Adorno, Aristotle, Bachelard, Bateson, Benjamin, Böhme, Caillois, Darwin, Foucault, Freud, Gadamer, Goffman, Heidegger, Hochschild, Huizinga, Kant, Kuhn, Marcuse, Maslow, Popper, Plato, Rousseau, Saussure, Schutz and Zizek, just to mention a few of Coyne's repertoire. The interdisciplinary lens is a useful perspective through which Coyne shapes the understanding of mood and mobility in relation to various digital media. This is definitely the strength but also the weakness of the book. To use Coyne's own image, I feel a bit dizzy when I read the book. It is like going around in circles without knowing where to start and where to end. There is nothing wrong with the interdisciplinary argumentation, but I was in a mood of ontological vertigo when I finished the book.

Anne Brus is finishing her PhD at the Roskilde University, Department of Psychology and Educational Studies, Centre of Health Promotion. In her PhD thesis she analyses computer game addiction as a social construction, and she focuses specifically on how young people interact with the stigma of computer game addiction from an everyday life perspective.

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