

MISQ Archivist

Everything Flows: Studying Continuous Socio-Technological Transformation in a Fluid and Dynamic Digital World

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Abstract

Ongoing digital innovations are transforming almost every aspect of our contemporary societies—rendering our lives and work evermore fluid and dynamic. This paper is an invitation to likewise remake our theorizing of socio-technological transformation by shifting from *actor-centric* orientations toward a *flow-oriented* approach and vocabulary. Such a shift from actors to the flows of action allows us to offer an innovative theory of socio-technological transformation that does not rely on self-contained actors or technologies as originators of transformation. To do this, we turn to the work of social anthropologist Tim Ingold to advance a theoretical vocabulary of *flowing lines of action* and their *correspondences*. We expound three modalities of correspondence, namely *timing*, *attentionality*, and *undergoing*, which together explain the dynamics of creation, sensing, and actualization of (trans)formative possibilities for action along socio-technological flows. We demonstrate the application and utility of this vocabulary through an empirical illustration and show how it reveals novel insights for research vis-à-vis existing theoretical alternatives. Finally, we outline the implications of our approach for research and suggest some guiding principles for studying and theorizing digital phenomena through this orientation. Besides theory, our vocabulary also provides practitioners an alternative approach on managing digital transformation—one that emphasizes cultivating favorable conditions under which transformative possibilities can be created, sensed, and actualized at timely moments. As such, we invite both scholars and practitioners to engage with our approach to develop novel ways of understanding, theorizing, and engaging with socio-technological phenomena *along* our increasingly fluid and dynamic digital world.

Keywords: Transformation, flow of action, temporality, becoming, process theory, actor-centricity, Ingold, correspondence, timing, attentionality, undergoing