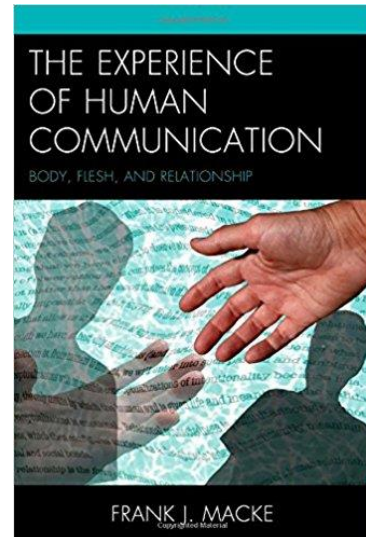


Frank J. Macke, **The Experience of Human Communication: Body, Flesh, and Relationship**, Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015, 223 pp., \$90.00 (hardcover), \$42.99 (paperback).

Reviewed by
Diana E. Ritter
New York University, USA

Though it's less than a half-century old, the field of communication studies on American campuses has an established discourse and orthodoxy in its program. Mathematicians Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's (1949) book *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* offers a highly scientific and structured process of communication that has been "the" accepted model in communication studies for several years. In ***The Experience of Human Communication: Body, Flesh, and Relationship***, author Frank J. Macke offers a very different concept of human communicative experience, one that breaks away from the scientific and intellectual, and explores the philosophical, epistemological, and spiritual.



Macke relies heavily on the works of three 20th century French philosophers: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Michel Foucault, and Georges Bataille. Merleau-Ponty's writings on consciousness and its relation to body and flesh, Foucault's theories on embodiment, and Bataille's work on how "communication emerges as a matter of psychological lived experience" (p. 22) weave throughout the book, often intersecting, and supporting Macke's "effort to describe an existential theory of human communicative experience" (p. 214) and open a discussion of what he envisions "as a possible future for the human science of Communicology" (p. 28).

The Experience of Human Communication: Body, Flesh, and Relationship begins with an introductory chapter, wherein Macke describes the current state of communication studies, as an information-theoretic discourse situated among the natural sciences, and where he would like to see the thinking around it shift, to a more experiential, fluid activity that cannot be so scientifically defined. Macke turns his attention to therapeutic experience and the seeming desire of others to understand mental and emotional states, in chapter 2. Citing Pyrrhonian skepticism, Macke references the term *ataraxia*, meaning nothing is good or bad, and uses it throughout the chapter as he discusses Gregory Bateson and Jurgen Ruesch's (1951) four levels of communicative experience, Martin Heidegger's (1954/1968) concept of thinking, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1968) concept of flesh, Michel Foucault's (2005) concept of "self-care," and the influence of our families of origin in terms of our intimacy with others and psychological boundaries.

Macke dives further into the work of Merleau-Ponty in chapter 3, specifically "Eye and Mind" (1964), and asks, "What is it that 'we' see when we look into the mirror? What is the flesh that we behold? To what extent is our self-reflection at all possible?" (p. 61). Macke begins by describing the

thoughts he had about his "self" when he looked in a mirror as a teenager and touches on the familiar story of Narcissus, describing how "we" are all like Narcissus and have feelings for what we are seeing, and a wonderment. He states, "I would even go so far as to say that such a wonderment is the foundation for our *deepest* contact with the Other. . . . I see what others have seen in me. I see 'me'; I see myself" (pp. 66–67).

In chapter 4, Macke explores *phatic communion*, which can be best described as a language used to establish a social contact or atmosphere as opposed to it being used to exchange ideas or information. Macke focuses a lot on the word *context* because he does not agree it needs to be a part of this phatic communion, and finds it more so in line with modern-day psychology's preoccupation with "brain, neuro-chemistry, and cognition" (p. 73). It is about contact, and Merleau-Ponty's "embodied intersubjectivity, an intersubjectivity of experience and flesh" (p. 73).

Using Margaret Mahler's theory about our fleshly attachment stemming from birth, where we are literally attached to our mothers (Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975), and Roman Jakobson's (1990) model of communication, Macke argues our main intention in communication is to establish a fleshly attachment to our fellows: "Simply, we are not nor are we ever complete unto ourselves. Perhaps 'our' greatest interpersonal myth is the notion that my skin marks the limit of my flesh and that my flesh marks the limit of my body" (p. 76).

In chapter 5, Macke goes deeper into the fleshly attachment, expanding on Merleau-Ponty's idea of "flesh as expression" (p. 84) and Gaston Bachelard's (1983) ideas of "fluidity." Flesh is not to be seen as a concrete substance, but rather as "an element of Being" (p. 87) and the way we connect with one another. Intimacy allows for flow and fluidity, which is what Macke says, "satisfies the existential measure of interaction" (p. 91). We are all connected, we all flow together, and only through transformative intimacy can we find true communication, that which feeds our soul.

Macke then shifts to an examination of the word *parole* in chapter 6, which means "speech" in French, and notes its connection to the word *parabola*. When we speak with one another, we are casting out our words to another body, thus energizing the space between the bodies in an "arc of expression" (p. 106). Macke connects the parabolic, a crossing over, with the diabolic, a crossing through. To have meaningful communication, one must experience this "crossing through," or crossing of boundaries, and be diabolical. It means forgetting our objectives, letting go of ourselves, and welcoming the devil.

That is to say, pure communication rests in this devilish, or diabolical, nature because it excites us, and it is where our desire to connect manifests. It is also closely tied to eroticism, which is what Macke expands upon in chapter 7, along with identity and intimacy. He uses the transition from childhood to adolescence to clearly exemplify when one becomes aware of oneself, calling it a "transition into eroticism" (p. 128), the "erotic" being the new urges and fantasies experienced as an adolescent, which contrast with what we are used to as children, leading to a questioning of our own existence and a need for ego identity.

In chapter 8, Macke ties gender, sexuality, childhood, and eros together with the works of Carl Jung (1951/1991) and Michel Foucault (1969/1972) on the opposition of feminine and masculine forms of energy. This opposition encourages us to search for who we truly are, an understanding that communicating with others can only aid. But we must be sure to practice self-care and healthy boundaries, Macke warns in chapter 9, as this will be the only way to experience true intimacy and not a superficial attachment.

"In intimacy we often dream together" (p. 188), Macke says in his final chapter prior to concluding the book. Following that idea, Macke does away with the line separating waking consciousness and dreaming, theorizing that they live in the same space. In waking consciousness, we have societal and moral obligations that can make us feel "wrong" in our choices or thoughts, but in dreams, nothing is "off limits." We are allowed to experience that which is already in us, that which can help us form our ego identity, leading to intimacy with others.

With regard to the language Macke uses throughout the book and the great number of sources he references, his intended audience comprises those in the communication studies field, as he often emphasizes, and philosophical thinkers. It is a challenging book to grasp at times, especially in that it parallels so closely with that which cannot be explained; however, when the reader arrives at Macke's concluding chapter, he or she will find a summary that is presented in more familiar language. Macke clearly ties together all that he has been quoting, questioning, and theorizing in a way that allows the reader to understand how each of the preceding chapters participates in his ultimate goal of inserting humanness into a field where academic and theoretical thinking has taken control, and offering an intelligent and much-needed inaugural study to inspire continual change in communicology today.

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