In the spirit of Heidegger’s Being and Time (1962 [1927]), I shall take the view that technology – technè – is a mode of alètheuein, rather than a mere instrumental means to some end. It is therefore a mode of revealing and of creating reality and is part of the very fabric of the world(s) we inhabit. In relation to a number of everyday semiotic technologies – both analogue and digital – I shall also consider how technologies of meaning-making, in revealing and creating reality, transform and extend the world, the mind and the body image of participants such that agents cannot be seen as shrinkable to a biological core contained and confined by the skin of the individual (Clark 2001). Instead, we need to see how biological agents and semiotic technologies – biotechnological hybrids, to echo Clark - together develop, learn, think, and feel as complex distributed systems that cannot be explanatorily reduced to processes going on inside the biological agent per se. I will accordingly suggest how “the nontrivial causal spread” of neural and extraneural bodily and environmental dynamics (Wheeler 2005) can play a central role in a Heidegger-inspired alternative to Cartesian psychology – one which takes as central the embodied-embedded nature of cognition and semiosis and the role of semiotic technologies in this.

This paper will consider on the basis of the above observations how cognitive-semiotic processes are constructed in and through inter-individual patterns of multi-agent and embodied multimodal interaction when we engage with various technologies of meaning-making – analogue and/or digital (e.g. books, drawing, television, computers). I shall also consider some of the implications for a theory of learning and development of the nexus of multimedia technology and meaning-making and its effects on mind and body, especially in relation to children (Greenfield 1984). This step requires us to consider how intrinsic functional constraints on semiosis qua action and representation (Halliday 1979) embed socially distributed and embodied semiotic technologies in the cultural world. Accordingly, I shall build connections with Latour’s (1996, 2005) discussion of “mediators” (as distinct from “intermediaries”) to show how human meaning-making activity and cognition are always related to material and semiotic processes that are distributed across diverse time-scales (Lemke 2000; Thibault 2004a, 2004b). This has important implications for how we think about meaning-making and human agency in relation to semiotic technologies that have the power to extend body and mind (Thibault 2005a, 2005b).

A further question I will address is the following: how might we bring closer together phenomenological, semiotic, and neurobiological perspectives on the agent’s body image and the tactile-kinaesthetic, cognitive and affective relationships between agents and the semiotic technologies whereby mind and body are extended beyond the biological body. It is important in this connection to document and
understand the multimodal tactile-kinaesthetic relationship of the living feeling animate body to the
semiotic affordance of multimedia technologies and the ways they actively mediate thinking, feeling, and
perception. As I hope to show, different semiotic modalities entail different biomechanical abilities. This
means in turn that different biomechanical abilities have the potential to integrate with different kinds of
activities. Different activities are consequent on these biomechanical abilities (Harris 1998: 113; Thibault
2007). In this light, we can reassess the importance of semiotic expression as affording different
biomechanical abilities and the activities that these enable us to access and integrate across times, places,
and persons, rather than seeing expression as the semiotic 'encoding' of content.

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