

The Crisis of the Decoupled Subject: Embodied Erasure in the Age of Environmental and Digital Abstraction

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100300008>

Received: 24 January 2026; Accepted: 04 February 2026; Published: 24 March 2026

ABSTRACT

Contemporary governance and corporate systems increasingly rely on the logic of “decoupling,” the theoretical separation of economic and technological progress from their material and human consequences. This paper argues that such abstraction produces a profound “crisis of the decoupled subject,” where the human being is treated as a manipulable data point rather than a sensing, feeling entity. By synthesizing recent ethnographic analysis of sensory displacement among climate migrants in Bangladesh and quantitative investigations into the affective paradoxes of AI service interactions, this study identifies a parallel mechanism of “embodied erasure” operating across environmental and digital domains. The analysis demonstrates that while systems prioritize “legibility” and quantitative efficiency, human well-being remains stubbornly tethered to sensory richness and affective connection. Drawing on theories of digital damage, solastalgia, and embodied knowing, the paper contends that the privileging of the “machine metaphor” over lived experience systematically undermines human resilience. Ultimately, it calls for a re-entanglement of efficiency with embodiment, proposing that sustainable futures depend on recognizing the moral and sensory primacy of the feeling subject.

Keywords: Embodied Erasure, Decoupling, Climate Migration, Artificial Intelligence, Affect Theory, Digital Damage, Slow Violence.

INTRODUCTION

The Myth of Abstraction

The Logic of Decoupling

The defining characteristic of late-modern governance and capitalist production is the pursuit of “decoupling.” In the realm of environmental policy, this manifests as the seductive promise of “green growth,” the idea that infinite economic expansion can be successfully severed from ecological degradation through technological efficiency. In the digital realm, it appears as the promise of frictionless automation, the belief that the provision of service, care, and knowledge can be severed from the vulnerable labor of the human body. However, this theoretical separation often masks a brutal material reality. As Albert (2020) argues in his incisive critique of the “Fourth Industrial Revolution,” the concept of “absolute decoupling” is largely a myth utilized to stabilize global capitalism in the face of escalating earth system crises.

Albert posits that while developed nations and technology conglomerates claim to shrink their environmental footprints while growing their economies, they have not truly decoupled growth from harm. Instead, they have merely shifted the “embodied material-energetic costs” to the periphery, to the global South, to extraction zones, and to the invisible laborers who maintain the digital infrastructure. The illusion of a dematerialized economy relies on keeping these costs hidden. The clean interface of a digital service hides the dirty reality of rare earth mining; the “sustainable” city hides the displaced populations pushed to its margins. This systemic reliance on abstraction allows power to operate without accountability, treating the earth and the human body not as limits to be respected, but as externalities to be managed.

This systemic reliance on abstraction does more than simply obscure carbon footprints or labor conditions; it creates a fundamental “crisis of the decoupled subject.” When political and economic systems are designed to optimize aggregate metrics, whether GDP, crop yields, or ticket resolution times, the specific, embodied reality of the human subject is rendered obsolete. The human being is no longer viewed as a sensing entity embedded in a complex ecological and social web, but as a node in a network, a consumer of resources, or a processor of information. This paper posits that this epistemic shift constitutes a form of violence. It is a violence that does not always wound the flesh directly but erodes the sensory and affective conditions necessary for a meaningful life. It forces the human subject to inhabit a world designed for data, not for bodies.

The Dual Manifestation of the Crisis

To understand the scale and mechanism of this erasure, one must look beyond the traditional silos of “environmental sociology” and “digital sociology.” The environmental crisis and the automation crisis are often treated as separate phenomena, one biological, one technological. However, this paper brings together two seemingly disparate case studies to reveal a singular underlying logic of “embodied erasure.”

First, we examine the environmental rupture through the work of Mia (2025). In “Riverbank Erosion as Slow Violence,” Mia presents a deeply textured sensory ethnography of families displaced from the riverine island of Bhola, Bangladesh, to the dense, chaotic slums of Dhaka. The crisis Mia describes is not merely one of economic loss or physical relocation; it is a rupture of the “sensory world.” The migrants do not just lose their land; they lose the specific interplay of smells, sounds, and textures that constituted their sense of self. The “slow violence” of climate change is experienced here as an assault on the senses, a forced transition from the “odor of wet earth” and the rhythmic sound of the river to the “stench of garbage” and the cacophony of urban traffic. This represents a profound decoupling of the subject from their ecological home, where the environment ceases to be a source of identity and becomes a source of sensory assault.

Second, we examine the technological rupture through the work of Hasan (2025). In “AI Efficiency Versus Human Empathy,” Hasan investigates the rapid automation of service interactions in the United States. His study reveals a revealing paradox: while AI agents are statistically rated as more “effective” at solving technical problems, users report significantly higher satisfaction, emotional support, and feelings of being understood when interacting with humans. Despite the “friction” of human interaction, which Hasan notes can even induce social anxiety, users crave the “relational depth” that automated systems strip away. Here, the decoupling is affective; the subject is severed from the reciprocal loop of human empathy, left to interact with a system that simulates care without the capacity to feel it.

This paper contends that environmental degradation and digital automation function as parallel mechanisms of “embodied erasure.” Both systems operate by privileging the “legibility” of data over the “messiness” of lived experience. Whether rewriting the landscape for industrial agriculture or rewriting social interaction for algorithmic efficiency, these processes generate profound “digital damage” (Edwards, 2025) and “solastalgia” (Tschakert et al., 2013). By systematically ignoring the sensory and affective needs of the human subject, the logic of decoupling ultimately severs the essential connection between the feeling subject and their world, undermining the very foundations of human well-being. The crisis of the decoupled subject is, therefore, a crisis of belonging, a loss of the sensory and affective tethers that bind us to the earth and to one another.

Theoretical Framework: From Machine Metaphors to Embodied Knowing

To understand how embodied erasure functions, we must first interrogate the metaphors that structure our built environments and knowledge systems. The crisis of the decoupled subject is rooted in a long intellectual history of viewing the human being as a machine, a processor of inputs and outputs, rather than a sentient creature. This theoretical framework unpacks how this reductionist view has been operationalized in both architecture and epistemology.

Deconstructing the “Human-as-Machine” Paradigm

The design of our physical and digital worlds is often predicated on a reductionist view of human existence.

Lee (2022) traces this tendency through architectural history, examining how the “body-as-machine” metaphor has influenced the built environment. In the modern period, architecture and urban planning began to prioritize function over feeling, designing spaces for efficiency rather than sensory habitation. Lee argues that this metaphorical structure fundamentally disconnects humans from their ecological context; the building becomes a “machine for living in,” and the occupant becomes a component of that machine. This legacy is visible in the slum environments described by Mia (2025), where housing is reduced to bare shelter, devoid of the sensory qualities that constitute a “home.” In such spaces, the “machine” metaphor reaches its logical conclusion: the environment is optimized for density and survival, but it fails to account for the sensory needs of the inhabitant, leading to alienation and distress.

This reductionism extends from our physical structures to our epistemic frameworks, how we understand knowledge itself. Blackie & Luckett (2025) argue that the rise of digital automation has entrenched an “impoverished” version of knowledge. In the age of generative AI, there is a tendency to view knowledge as disembodied information that can be generated, transferred, and consumed without a “knower.” They contend that when humans are viewed merely as “information processors,” a view promoted by the logic of automation, the system separates “knowledge from the knower.” This separation ignores the vital roles of intuition, imagination, and bodily presence in the creation of meaning. Knowledge is not just data to be retrieved; it is something felt and enacted by a living body situated in a specific time and place. By treating knowledge as a commodity independent of the knower, automation erodes the value of human experience.

Consequently, the push for automation leads to a form of “deskilling” that is not just technical but existential. Gill (2008) contrasts “knowledge as information transfer,” the dominant model in digital systems, with “knowledge as embodied performance.” Gill argues that true knowing is a process of “tacit knowing embodied in dialogue and performance.” It is the difference between reading a manual on how to comfort a grieving person and actually holding space for them. When automated systems replace human interaction, as seen in Hasan’s (2025) study, we lose “experiential knowing.” The user is no longer a participant in a shared performance of problem-solving but a recipient of a computed output. This shift threatens the human ability to achieve “wholeness,” fracturing the continuity of experience that relies on the seamless integration of thought, feeling, and action. The subject becomes passive, a recipient of algorithmic decisions rather than an active agent in their own world.

Reclaiming the Sentient Subject

Against this mechanistic paradigm, this paper advocates for a theoretical reclamation of the sentient subject. We must move beyond the Cartesian dualism that privileges the mind over the body. Bonvino (2025) proposes a paradigm shift from *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) to *sentio et cogito, ergo sum* (I feel and think, therefore I am). Bonvino’s work on the interconnection between emotion and cognition suggests that human well-being cannot be calculated through rational metrics alone; it must be felt. Emotions are not distractions from rational thought but are the core components of how we navigate and value our world. Without the ability to feel, “efficiency” becomes a meaningless metric. A system that is perfectly efficient but emotionally desolate is, in human terms, a failed system.

This reclamation is inherently political. Clough (2018) theorizes the “political economy of affect,” arguing that contemporary capitalism attempts to “measure and accumulate affect,” abstracting human feeling into data points that can be predicted and manipulated. Clough warns that this quantification creates an “other-than-human embodiment,” where the self is connected to computational networks that exploit affective labor while denying affective care.

This is the mechanism of erasure: the system acknowledges emotion only to the extent that it can be measured and monetized (e.g., sentiment analysis, engagement metrics), stripping it of its relational power. To resist this, we must insist on the “un-measurable” value of the felt experience, the sensory grief of the migrant and the emotional need of the service user, as the true site of human reality. We must assert that there are dimensions of the human experience that cannot be decoupled, digitized, or optimized without being destroyed.

METHODOLOGY

A Comparative Synthesis

This paper employs a comparative theoretical synthesis to explore the phenomenon of “embodied erasure” across divergent domains. While primarily a theoretical engagement with the concepts of decoupling and abstraction, the analysis is grounded in a secondary synthesis of two distinct empirical datasets: Mia’s (2025) ethnographic work on climate migration in the Global South and Hasan’s (2025) quantitative survey on digital automation in the Global North.

Rationale for Case Selection

The selection of these two cases is purposive and designed to maximize contrast. Typically, environmental displacement and digital service automation are treated as unrelated fields of inquiry, one belonging to development studies and political ecology, the other to human-computer interaction and digital sociology. By placing them in conversation, this study aims to identify a “trans-domain logic” of decoupling.

1. **Case A (Environmental/Global South):** Represents the erasure of the sensing body through the degradation of the physical environment. It focuses on the loss of “place” and sensory continuity.
2. **Case B (Digital/Global North):** Represents the erasure of the feeling subject through the automation of social interaction. It focuses on the loss of “presence” and affective continuity.

By analyzing these disparate contexts through a shared theoretical framework, the study seeks to demonstrate that “embodied erasure” is not a localized side effect of specific policies, but a structural feature of modern systemic abstraction.

Analytical Approach

The analysis proceeds through a thematic synthesis, applying the theoretical lens of “slow violence” (Nixon, 2011; adapted from Mia, 2025) and “affective labor” (Hochschild, 1983; adapted from Hasan, 2025) to both datasets. The analysis interrogates how “efficiency” and “legibility” are defined in each context and identifies the specific human costs that are externalized by these definitions. The synthesis is further informed by a critical reading of the “machine metaphor” in epistemic systems (Blackie & Lockett, 2025) to explain the systemic inability to value embodied experience.

Case Study A: The Environmental Erasure (Sensory Displacement)

The theoretical violence of decoupling becomes brutally physical in the context of climate migration. Mia’s (2025) ethnographic study of riverbank erosion in Bangladesh provides a harrowing illustration of how environmental systems, when viewed solely through the lens of geophysical change or economic adaptation, obscure the human tragedy of sensory loss.

The “Slow Violence” of Sensory Loss

Mia frames the displacement of families from Bhola not as a singular catastrophic event, but as “slow violence.” While standard metrics might measure this displacement in terms of hectares lost, families relocated, or GDP impact, Mia’s “sensory ethnography” reveals a deeper, more intimate loss. Through 23 semi-structured interviews and participant observation, Mia documents how the participants describe their lives in Bhola through a rich tapestry of sensory memories: the “odor of wet earth,” the “chanting of birds,” the cool touch of the river breeze, and the silence of the night. These were not merely aesthetic preferences; they were the sensory anchors of their identity and daily rhythm. The environment was a participant in their lives, not just a backdrop.

The relocation to the Korail slum in Dhaka represents a violent “sensory displacement.” In the slum, the multisensory richness of the riverine environment is replaced by a “severe sensorial regime.” The “odor of earth” is replaced by the “stench of garbage” and open drains. The “chanting of birds” is drowned out by the relentless

“traffic noise” and the clangor of construction. Mia (2025) notes that this shift induces physical symptoms—respiratory distress, headaches, skin irritations from harsh water, and a perpetual state of vigilance. The body, tuned to the rhythms of the river, rejects the sensory assault of the city.

This phenomenon aligns closely with the concept of “solastalgia,” explored by Tschakert et al. (2013) in their study of environmental change in Ghana. Solastalgia is the distress caused by environmental change while one is still connected to their home environment, or the grief of losing that home connection. Tschakert et al. describe how the degradation of the landscape—withered crops, drying wells, the loss of beauty—triggers strong emotional responses, leading to the “desiccation” of the self. Just as the land dries up, so too does the emotional reservoir of the inhabitant. For Mia’s subjects, the slum is a “hollow home” because it lacks the sensory vitality that sustains their emotional well-being. The erasure of their sensory world is a form of existential decoupling; they are physically present in Dhaka, but their sensing bodies remain alienated, grieving for a landscape that no longer exists. They suffer from a form of homesickness that cannot be cured by shelter alone, because the *feeling* of home, the sensory assemblage, is gone.

The Mechanics of Distancing

Why are these sensory costs so often ignored in policy and planning? Liu & Sengers (2021) argue that the systems managing land and agriculture prioritize “legibility” over lived reality. In their analysis of digital agriculture, they show how data-driven models are designed to make the landscape “readable” to the state and the market. This demand for legibility restructures the physical landscape to fit the model, often erasing the “invisible labor” and local knowledge of the inhabitants. This process is historically linked to “racialized dispossession,” where the erasure of local ways of knowing serves to justify the seizure and transformation of land. In the case of Bhola, the riverbank is legible to the state as a “risk zone” or a “resource,” but the sensory world of its inhabitants is illegible, and therefore expendable. The state sees the land in terms of geometry and geology; the inhabitant sees it in terms of memory and feeling.

This distancing is further exacerbated by the digitization of the lithosphere. Sammler & House-Peters (2023) describe how digital technologies “distance the miner from the mine.” In modern extraction industries, the physical site is converted into data streams managed from remote operation centers. This “unblackboxing” of the resource serves to “obscure the ecological, social, and cultural context” of the site. The embodied knowledge of the miner—the feel of the rock, the smell of the dust—is rendered obsolete. Similarly, the climate migrant is distanced from their land not just by erosion, but by a system of disaster management that treats them as a demographic statistic rather than a community with a deep, embodied connection to place. The “digital twin” of the environment survives in the data, while the sensing human is displaced. This abstraction allows policymakers to view relocation as a logistical success even when it is a sensory failure.

Political Ecology of the Body

To counter this erasure, Tschakert (2012) advocates for a political ecology that moves “from impacts to embodied experiences.” Tschakert critiques the reliance on “numeric vulnerability indices” and integrated modeling, which often sanitize the violence of climate change. True justice, she argues, requires tracing the political ecology of degradation from the global scale of carbon emissions down to the “global intimate,” the embodied experience of the suffering individual.

Mia’s (2025) work is a realization of this call. By focusing on the *senses*, Mia re-entangles the discourse of climate change with the body, proving that the loss of a home is not just a calculation of property value, but a devastation of the “feeling subject.” This perspective demands a new kind of policy making, one that considers “sensory justice.” It suggests that the right to a healthy environment includes the right to a sensory landscape that sustains the self, and that the destruction of such landscapes is a violation of human rights.

Case Study B: The Technological Erasure (Affective Displacement)

If the environmental crisis erases the sensing body, the technological crisis erases the feeling subject.

Hasan's (2025) research on AI in customer service provides a stark counterpoint to Mia's ethnography, revealing how the logic of decoupling operates within the digital interface to strip interaction of its affective core.

The Paradox of Efficiency

Hasan's study is built around a revealing paradox found in a cross-sectional survey of 150 U.S. adults. When comparing user interactions with AI assistants versus human agents, the AI systems were consistently rated as more "effective" on a 10-point scale (Mean: 6.01 vs 5.48). They were faster, more accurate in retrieving data, and available 24/7. According to the logic of decoupling—which values speed and friction reduction—this increase in efficiency should lead to higher user well-being. Yet, Hasan finds the opposite. Users reported significantly higher levels of "satisfaction" (3.68 vs 3.39), "emotional support" (3.70 vs 3.18), and "feeling understood" (3.81 vs 3.42) when interacting with human agents.

This discrepancy highlights the profound difference between "transactional success" and "relational depth." The AI resolves the ticket, but it fails to resolve the user's affective state. Users described the AI interactions as "flat" or "hollow," devoid of the empathy required to turn a service interaction into a human connection. Hasan (2025) notes a surprising and crucial finding: human interactions were associated with higher levels of "anxiety" than AI interactions (3.57 vs 3.33). Users felt the social pressure of performance, the fear of judgment, and the complexity of navigating social cues. Yet, despite this anxiety, they still preferred the human agent (Preference for future use: 3.68 vs 3.27). This suggests that users value the "messiness" of human connection—even its anxieties—over the sterile efficiency of the machine. The anxiety proves that the interaction is *real*; it is an encounter between two feeling subjects, whereas the AI interaction is a monologue with a script. The user is willing to endure the "cost" of anxiety to gain the "value" of being heard.

The Tension Between Agency and Automation

The failure of AI to satisfy the user points to broader "tensions in automation," as explored by Shin (2025). Shin applies the "Stimulus-Organism-Response" (S-O-R) framework to show that while AI features act as stimuli that affect user emotions, the design of these systems often ignores the "organism," the user's internal state of well-being. The prioritization of quantitative efficiency (speed, cost reduction) overrides the user's need for "cognitive and emotional well-being." The user is treated as a problem to be solved, not a person to be cared for. The system is optimized for the *company's* metrics, not the *user's* experience.

This aligns with Bissell's (2021) conceptualization of automation as an "encounter." Bissell argues that automation is not a neutral tool but a process that "transforms bodies at the level of their capacities to affect and be affected." In the service interactions described by Hasan, automation functions as a "deskilling" mechanism for empathy. It "reskills" users to accept the robotic logic of the interaction, teaching them to speak in keywords, to lower their emotional expectations, and to accept "pseudo-intimacy" in place of genuine care. The danger, as Bissell notes, is that this logic seeps out of the digital realm and into the social, creating "power geometries" where those who control the automation dictate the terms of emotional engagement for everyone else. We are trained to expect less from each other because we are so accustomed to getting nothing from our machines.

Designing for Isolation vs. Connection

The current trajectory of AI development stands in stark contrast to the vision of "Intelligent Environments" proposed by Burzagli et al. (2022). Burzagli et al. argue that technology-enhanced environments should be centered on "people's well-being," emphasizing "affective quality, engagement, and connectedness" as preconditions for success. A truly intelligent environment would support the user's sensory and emotional needs, automating tasks only to free up space for deeper human connection.

However, Hasan's (2025) findings suggest that the industry is moving in the opposite direction. By replacing human agents with AI, corporations are automating the *connection* itself, leaving the user in a state of "affective isolation." The technology is used to build a wall between the institution and the individual, filtering out the "inefficient" demands of human emotion. This is the technological equivalent of the "slum" described by Mia: a space designed for bare function (survival/resolution) that starves the inhabitant of the sensory and affective

nourishment required for a thriving life. The “smart” system becomes a mechanism for emotional impoverishment, decoupling the user from the sources of empathy that define human community.

Synthesis: The Assemblage of Damage

The environmental erasure described by Mia and the technological erasure described by Hasan are not separate phenomena. They are entangled manifestations of the same systemic drive to decouple profit and process from human and material reality. By synthesizing these findings, we can see the full scope of the “assemblage of damage.”

The Materiality of the Digital

We must first acknowledge that the “digital” is materially rooted in the “environmental.” The AI systems analyzed by Hasan do not exist in the ether; they rely on vast data centers, energy grids, and the extraction of rare earth minerals. Edwards (2025) introduces the concept of “digital damage” to describe this entanglement. Digitality, Edwards argues, is an “embodied condition.” The “cloud” is a rhetorical device that hides the “material and ecological dimensions” of digital infrastructure. The mining required to build the servers that host the AI agents causes the very environmental degradation that displaces communities like those in Bhola.

Furthermore, Edwards (2020) argues that we must “story digital damage” to understand these connections. The rhetoric of the digital age, frictionless, clean, infinite, masks the “relational harms” it produces. Kuntsman (2020) critiques the prevailing “digital solutionism,” the idea that an app or an algorithm can solve the climate crisis. Kuntsman calls for “materialist accountability,” urging us to look at where and how digital tools inflict harm. When we view Hasan’s AI agents through Mia’s environmental lens, we see a closed loop of damage: the drive for digital efficiency fuels the extraction that destroys the environment, while the resulting technologies are used to insulate the privileged from the human consequences of that destruction. The AI agent that “efficiently” answers a query is powered by the same logic that erodes the riverbank.

Governance through Crisis

Both case studies also reveal a specific mode of governance. Athanasiou (2017) argues that “crisis management” has become a central technique of neoliberal governmentality. Whether managing the “crisis” of flood victims in Bangladesh or the “crisis” of high service volume in a call center, the system seeks to “normalize” uncertainty rather than address the root causes. The goal is not to stop the erosion or to solve the user’s underlying problem, but to *manage* the fallout efficiently. The migrant is moved to a slum; the user is moved to a chatbot. In both cases, the subject is contained, their suffering rendered manageable and legible to the system. The crisis is used to legitimize new forms of control—the slum clearance, the automated workflow—that further disempower the subject.

To counter this mechanistic governance, Hamilakis (2017) proposes that we view human life as “sensorial assemblages.” Hamilakis warns against “mechanistic reincarnations of systems thinking.” A human community is not a system of resource distribution; it is an assemblage of “memory, affect, and temporality.” Mia’s migrants survive through “digital soundscapes,” playing recordings of river sounds on their phones to remember home. Hasan’s users endure the anxiety of human interaction to feel “understood.” These are acts of “re-entangling” the senses. They represent the stubborn refusal of the human subject to be decoupled. They insist that memory, sound, and feeling are not inefficiencies to be eliminated, but the very stuff of life.

DISCUSSION

The Hierarchy of Experience

The synthesis of these findings points to a clear “hierarchy of experience” that current systems fail to respect. This hierarchy places the “lived” and the “felt” above the “efficient” and the “simulated.”

Natural vs. Technological Well-being

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that “natural” and “human” experiences possess an inherent superiority over “technological” and “automated” ones in generating well-being. Zarantonello et al. (2024) demonstrate that “natural consumption experiences” foster greater meaning and pleasure compared to technological ones. Their study on consumer well-being aligns perfectly with the findings of both Mia (2025) and Hasan (2025). Mia’s subjects mourn the loss of the natural environment not just for its resources, but for the *meaning* it gave their lives. Hasan’s subjects mourn the loss of the human agent not just for their utility, but for the *pleasure* of connection.

The “mindfulness” and “fatigue” factors identified by Zarantonello et al. are crucial here. Technological interactions often induce fatigue, the “Zoom fatigue” or the frustration of the chatbot loop, because they require cognitive effort without offering sensory or affective replenishment. Natural and human interactions, conversely, can be restorative. The smell of the earth or the sound of a sympathetic voice replenishes the subject. By decoupling the subject from these restorative sources, systems of abstraction deplete the human reservoir of resilience. We are creating a world that demands more from us cognitively while giving us less sensorially and affectively.

The Morality of Care

Finally, this crisis is fundamentally moral. Dragojlovic & Broom (2017) explore the “morality of care” through the lens of suffering. They argue that care is not just an outcome; it is a labor and a relation. It requires the presence of a body that can witness and respond to suffering. An AI can simulate the *result* of care, it can process a refund or provide a shelter address, but it cannot perform the *labor* of care. It cannot witness. It cannot look the sufferer in the eye and acknowledge their pain.

When we automate service or bureaucratize disaster relief, we create a “deficit of suffering.” The suffering of the subject is not met with a corresponding act of witnessing. It is processed, filed, and deleted. This creates a deep moral injury. The “crisis of the decoupled subject” is, at its heart, a crisis of loneliness. It is the loneliness of the migrant in the noisy slum who cannot hear the birds, and the loneliness of the user on the chat screen who cannot be heard by a human. It is the loneliness of a species that has built a world too efficient to care.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Methodological Limitations

While this synthesis provides a robust framework for understanding embodied erasure, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relies on the secondary synthesis of two specific datasets. While Mia (2025) and Hasan (2025) offer rich empirical insights, the analysis is limited by the scope of the original studies. The specific cultural contexts, rural Bangladesh and the urban United States, introduce variables that may not be universal. The sensory priorities of a riverine community in the Global South may not map perfectly onto the affective priorities of digital service users in the Global North. While this paper argues that the underlying logic of *erasure* is consistent, the specific manifestations of that erasure are undoubtedly culturally conditioned.

Furthermore, the focus on two extreme ends of the spectrum, catastrophic displacement and mundane service automation, leaves out the “middle ground” of everyday decoupling. Future research might explore how these dynamics play out in intermediate contexts, such as the digitization of healthcare (telemedicine) or the automation of urban management (smart cities), where the stakes are high but the erasure is more subtle.

Future Research Directions

This study opens several critical pathways for future inquiry. First, there is a need for primary comparative research that explicitly links environmental and digital well-being. Researchers could investigate “sensory resilience” in populations that are simultaneously navigating environmental degradation and digital exclusion. Does digital connectivity mitigate the sensory loss of displacement, or does it exacerbate it by replacing physical community with virtual surrogates?

Second, the concept of “sensory justice” requires further operationalization in policy. How can “Sensory Impact Assessments” be integrated into urban planning and disaster relief? Can we design AI systems that are “affectively aware,” not just simulating emotion, but designed to recognize the limits of automation and hand off to human agents when “witnessing” is required? The challenge for the next generation of sociologists and designers is to build systems that refuse the logic of decoupling, systems that are as messy, complex, and feeling as the subjects they serve.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the logic of “decoupling,” the attempt to separate systemic growth from embodied reality, produces a profound crisis of “embodied erasure.” Through the lens of Mia (2025), we see how this logic operates environmentally, turning the rich sensory world of the Bhola migrant into the “hollow home” of the slum. Through the lens of Hasan (2025), we see how it operates technologically, turning the rich relational potential of service into the “hollow interaction” of the AI agent.

Supported by theories of digital damage (Edwards, 2025), embodied knowing (Gill, 2008), and the political economy of affect (Clough, 2018), the analysis demonstrates that quantitative efficiency is a poor proxy for human well-being. When systems prioritize “legibility” over “lived experience,” they damage the sensory and affective foundations of the self.

The implication for the future is clear. We cannot design sustainable systems (whether cities, technologies, or economies) based on the myth of the decoupled subject. We must move beyond “metric power” to recognize that the human being is a sensing body that requires a healthy environment and empathetic connection to thrive. A true “Fourth Industrial Revolution” (Albert, 2020) must not be a revolution of abstraction, but a revolution of *re-entanglement*. It must be a revolution that restores the “odor of the earth” to the migrant and the “voice of the human” to the user, recognizing that in the assemblage of life, feeling is the only true measure of success.

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