Book Review: Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society edited by Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski and Kirsten A. Foot

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Across 13 chapters, scholars from media studies and science and technology studies offer insights into how we can see media technologies as complex sociomaterial phenomena. Topics include the lived realities of network infrastructure, media technologies as always in motion, and the various interests of digital users. **Mark Carrigan** *finds this a fascinating volume.*

Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski and Kirsten A. Foot. MIT Press. 2014.

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Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society is an impressively cohesive collection that seeks to map the intersections between Science and Technology Studies (STS) and Communication and Media Studies (CMS). The quality of the project has its origins in the approach the authors took to producing it: each essay went through many iterations, including a face-to-face meeting at a special workshop, with the demonstrable result of a diverse mix of contributions which nonetheless fit together into an overarching project. This endeavour was animated by a sense that both fields have come to share a concern with theorising media technologies but have in recent years been constrained by intellectual legacies that close down more than they open up in relation to this area of research (particularly the polarisation between technological determinism and social constructionism). In this sense, the project of the volume is a positive one, seeking to deploy the intellectual resources of both traditions in a way that better facilitates the investigation of these convergent objects of inquiry. However, what this means in practice varies greatly across an engagingly eclectic range of contributions made by scholars from both STS and CMS.
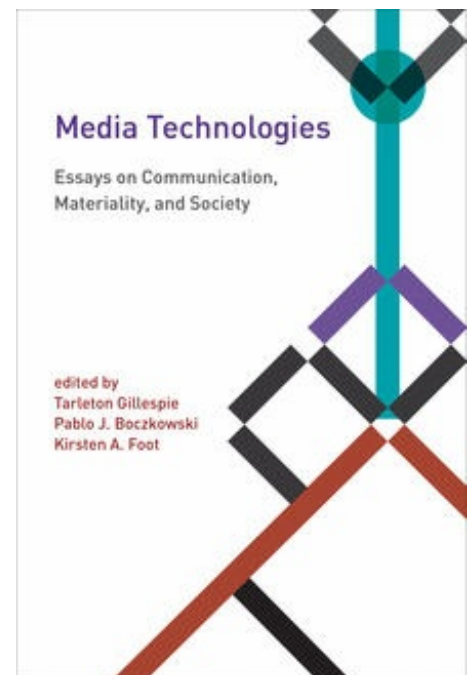
The third essay in the collection, written by Pablo J. Boczkowski and Ignacio Siles, draws on the notion of cosmopolitanism to outline an intellectual agenda for transcending the disciplinary boundaries which they, as with so many other contributors, see as constraining our understanding of media and communications. The division of labour encoded in the disciplinary silos which characterise the contemporary field have profound analytical implications for their objects of study e.g. scholars studying production rarely consider reception (and vice versa), while those studying the materiality of technology rarely consider their associated content dynamics (and vice versa). They make a plausible case that this structuring of social scientific knowledge has the effect of artificially prising apart shared objects in which these various aspects exhibit a deep interrelationship. In their view, the contemporary field of inquiry into media and technology encompasses four distinct spaces of scholarship: production/content, consumption/content, production/materiality and consumption/materiality. The relatively discrete form taken by these areas of inquiry has the effect of imposing a strong separation between elements of the technologies which commonly intermingle along their life cycle. The authors advocate a cosmopolitan sensibility as the solution to this problem, arguing that by seeking to overcome 'provincial' intellectual tendencies, we help make a more holistic approach to media technologies possible.

There are two important ways in which their argument is more sophisticated than a simple call to transgress artificial boundaries. Firstly, they recognise that these silos have their origins in the development of both STS and communications studies. Both fields originated in a project that cut across existing disciplinary boundaries in exciting and productive ways, however in recent years they have turned inwards as a product of institutionalisation, with deleterious consequences for their intellectual vibrancy. They suggest that the cosmopolitan sensibility which is the focus of their chapter did once animate both fields and that it can be recovered by stepping backwards in order to move forwards. Secondly, their claim about the interpenetration of different aspects of media technologies is not simply a theoretical one: even if we affirm the artificiality of these analytical boundaries on a theoretical level, we're still faced with the methodological challenge of overcoming the limitations they impose when conducting empirical research. The cosmopolitanism they propose would work towards the reintegration of these 'spaces of inquiry' across the full range of practices we tend to subsume under the label of 'scholarship'. Through doing so, they make a convincing case that STS and CMS can recapture the outwards facing orientation which animated their initial projects. Doing so can provide the foundation for a broader engagement with the social sciences that takes on a newfound importance at a time when media technologies are ever more closely woven into the fabric of social life.

The tenth essay in the collection, written by Christopher M. Kelty, addresses a very different concern but one no less radical in its inclination to traverse disciplinary boundaries. Observing the close relationship between the language of technology and the language of freedom, Kelty's contribution begins with the obvious question of precisely what this connection should be understood to be. Is it rhetorical or is it something more than this? The author leans towards the latter view, drawing on a curious mix of the social history of technology and political philosophy in order to make his case. He suggests that the treatment of the political in STS and CMS tends to be circumscribed, restricted to the affirmation of the existence of a political dimension of technology rather than any attempt to unpack its political origins and consequences. He traces the emergence of the personal computer, arguing that it has long been framed in terms of a specific concept of freedom because of the circumstances under which it was developed and the genuine liberation of sorts it entailed for those who had formerly worked with mainframes. A brief overview cannot do justice to the subtlety of an argument that weaves such distinct strands of inquiry together into a compelling whole. In this sense, the essay resembles the book as a whole: an impressive achievement, creatively traversing disciplinary boundaries in a manner valuable both in itself and for the further inquiry its diverse contents will no doubt provoke.

Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society is a fascinating volume, likely to be of interest to anyone working within STS and CMS or for those, such as myself, with an interest in issues pertaining to media and materiality emerging from other disciplinary modes of inquiry.

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