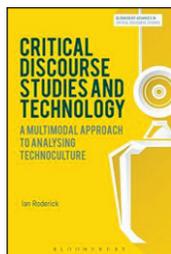


Review



Critical Discourse Studies and Technology: A Multimodal Approach to Analysing Technoculture. By Ian Roderick. London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016. 232 pp. ISBN: 9781472569486.

The ubiquity of technology lends itself to simply fading into the backdrop of society. When we do contemplate technology, well-trodden routes of discussion enjoy deliberating about its function, role, and impact in our everyday lives. However, most discussions along these lines conceive of technology as somehow separate from us and suggest that it enters our society independently and as a fully formed entity. *Critical Discourse Studies and Technology: A Multimodal Approach to Analysing Technoculture* by Ian Roderick seeks to present a different premise: one where our experiences with and of technology, and indeed technology itself, are formed through the ways we talk about and represent it. Roderick presents the notion of technoculture—a relationship where culture and technology are mutually constitutive—and consequently challenges notions of their dualism. For Roderick, there are no easily drawn lines between “culture” on the one hand and “technology” on the other. Technoculture is a contested terrain where patterns of social life, power relations, economic structures, politics, art, and popular culture are contextualized and materialized.

Technology, and technoculture, is a broad field of study. Specifically then, the author posits this book as intended for those interested in applying discourse analysis to the study of technology and everyday life. In particular, Roderick’s book is an example of how a Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) approach can demonstrate how our understanding of technology is discursively constituted. In this regard, *Critical discourse studies and technology* is both a theoretical discussion of discourse, culture, and technology, as well as a grounded and methodologically oriented toolkit. Roderick’s writing is novel in that technology has not yet been a popular topic of study for CDS, and he aims to demonstrate how such an approach is well suited to the study of technology and its percolation into our everyday lives. In line with the general tenets of CDS, Roderick positions himself and his work as explicitly political. In applying CDS to technology, he is not solely interested in conceptions and representations of technology. Rather, Roderick’s work is “a political engagement with the politics of technology” (p. 5). Critical parsing of technoculture can illustrate how meaning and power intersect in technologies to both reinforce and undermine structures of inequality.

In the first three chapters, Roderick lays the foundation for the more in-depth discussions of discourses of technology in the second half of the book. Here, he introduces his reader to the theory and methodology behind CDS as well as his specific approach. Roderick explicitly and resoundingly does away with the dualistic view of technology and culture. He instead relies heavily on the work of Gilbert Simondon and his con-

cepts of individuation, transduction, and associated milieu. Alongside Simondon, Roderick employs the work of Foucault and Deleuze. Roderick's discussion of this rather dense theory is accessible, and ultimately roots a critically, historically, and materially oriented discussion of technology. This section is at its strongest during Roderick's illustrative discussion of "the drone as technical object" (p. 20). Roderick teases out the history of military Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and effectively shows how these normalized technologies are constellations of social and political forces. This theme of militarized technologies proves to be one of the greatest strengths of Roderick's work and recurs throughout his analyses.

Beyond theory and methodology, Roderick's critical approach to the study of technoculture is supported by a discussion of four predominant discourses of technology: technology as progress, technological determinism, technological fetishism, and technological (dis)satisfaction. These four discourses, each comprising their own chapter, are the focus of the second half of the book. Here, Roderick reveals the actual "doing" of his CDS approach. He weaves together multiple illustrative examples of representations of technology to support his premise of technoculture as semiotic struggle. The chapters move from descriptive analyses of video games and television commercials to speeches and promotional blurbs. The wide variety of objects analyzed make for an engaging read, though the rapid shifts from one medium to another whittles down the narrative cohesion of this half of the book.

Where these chapters regain their footing is in the frequently recurring theme of "robots." While the media under investigations are diverse, the specific technology being discussed is often a robotic one, or simply a robot altogether. Most compelling in Roderick's writing is where he brings together his discussions of militarized technology and representations of robots. His emphasis on the agentivization of robots and robots as living labour is not only a fascinating discussion of how we see and understand technology, but also how we see and understand ourselves. Roderick argues that robots, far from being cold mechanical forces, are frequently represented as social machines, as subjects capable of affective relations. In the examples given, robots are now autonomous agents who are equally capable of the physical, cognitive, and social work now required in a post-Fordist landscape. This is a horizon where robots simulate human labour power to such a degree that "dead labor may truly suck the life of living labor" (p. 190). Through a close investigation of our experiences of, and with, robots, we are offered insight into the final disintegration of the labour process under capitalism.

Overall, *Critical discourse studies and technology* offers a concise and enjoyable account of CDS and technology. Despite a broad scope, Roderick generally sticks to novel interpretations of well-known discourses, and offers a challenge to popular conceptions of technology that would likely be immensely useful to those unfamiliar with CDS or critical theory more broadly. His obvious confidence employing a broad range of theorists strengthens his call for an interdisciplinary approach. At the same time, the use of such a range of theory can be puzzling, as some strands are picked up and others dropped without much contextualization or linearity. As such, the book is an excellent candidate for readers already somewhat acquainted with critical theory and the study

of technology. The book would be a terrific addition to a senior undergraduate or graduate seminar on CDS or the study of technology.

The piece bears relatively few shortcomings, though one is worth mentioning. Despite being a solid discussion of CDS as a field of study and as a robust toolkit for analysis, the book does not comprehensively make the case for why CDS is a uniquely useful approach to the study of technology. Indeed, with the strength of some of the theory sections, the return to descriptive analysis can pale in comparison. Additionally, the use of a multimodal approach is engaging, but hardly seems “ideally suited” (p. 5), as Roderick argues. The book could have benefited from a more robust argumentation for the use of CDS and multimodality. For example, while perhaps beyond the scope of this work, an analysis of a technology *itself* as a semiotic mode—not simply the representations of that technology—would have been a fascinating extension of traditional CDS.

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