

Book Reviews

Moving data: The iPhone and the future of media

Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (Eds.).
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It is difficult to introduce the topic of smartphones without sounding deterministic or overly sanguine. Words such as revolutionary, break-through, and “ultimate device” are often bandied about when describing the iPhone and its effects on nearly every aspect of society (p. 296). The book *Moving Data: The iPhone and the Future of Media* evaluates the iPhone as a media apparatus worthy of critical scrutiny and investigation across social, economic, and material platforms. Ostensibly the book appears to evaluate the iPhone; however, most chapters offer an analysis of the broad smartphone category in general. *Moving Data* is divided into four major emphasis areas spread across 22 chapters, including a brief concluding chapter. An eclectic mix of over 25 contributors helps to flesh out the “Data Archaeologies,” “Politics of Redistribution,” “The App Revolution,” and “Mobile Lives” sections. The book concludes with *Coda*—a critical cultural essay mourning the loss of solitude in a technologically mediated world. While each entry within the text warrants a full review on its own, for the sake of brevity I have kept most chapter reviews fairly brief.

“Data Archaeologies” is comprised of five chapters each examining the

experiences associated with the iPhone. The section opens with “With Eyes, With Hands: The Relocation of Cinema Into the iPhone” by Casetti and Sampietro. Drawing from an ethnographic study the authors posit that cinema shifting onto mobile devices has created what they term the “bubble condition” and “two-step condition” (p.22). Viewing films on the iPhone can be divided into three different types of existential bubbles: “epidermal,” “multifocalized,” and “intimate” (p. 27). Each of these bubble experiences is made possible by the convergence of filmic media onto mobile devices, referred to as the “two-step condition.”

In chapter 2, “Navigating Screenspace,” Nanna Verhoeff explores how the hybrid and layered nature of the iPhone warrants a reconceptualization of how we think about cartography. Verhoeff weaves together how the layered interface, tagging, and augmented reality necessitate viewing iPhone screenspace navigation as performative cartography as opposed to a static process. Chapter 3, “The iPhone as an Object of Knowledge” by Alexandra Schneider, references popular films as a way to explain how touch and visual perception are reincorporated into the media experience. Borrowing from film scholar Wanda Strauven, Schneider explains how media and information experiences, such as the flip book, began as a tactile engagement and then shifted to a “regime of visual and nontactile knowledge” thanks to the introduction of cinema and strictly viewed art and

museum installations (p. 57). The iPhone's constant tactile user engagement via "swiping" and "pinching" has shifted the media experience back to a visual and tactile state. Jennifer Streetskamp takes an installation art piece as a media archeology case study in Chapter 4. Streetskamp analyzes iPhone experience notions of layering, positioning, and location awareness in relation to a moving image installation art exhibition.

Chapter 5 is one of the most interesting and figuratively colorful chapters in the collection. Kristopher L. Cannon and Jennifer M. Barker draw parallels between Apple Inc. and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) in their entry 'Hard Candy.' At first it may be hard to conceptualize how a technology company and a candy factory are of relation, but the authors are able to draw more comparisons than one would think. Their premise is that, "like candy and Wonka himself, the iPhone invites and provokes childlike, curious, playful, and 'rude' behaviors even as it mitigates against them in extreme forms" (p. 85). The chapter definitely provides a delightful alternative way of examining Apple and the iPhone.

Section II, "Politics of Redistribution," shares the common theme of audiovisual content distribution across Apple products. The editors' decision to arrange chapter 6, "Personal Media in the Digital Economy" (Goran Bolin), and chapter 7, "Big Hollywood Small Screens" (Alisa Perren and Karen Petruska), together definitely contributes to the overall flow of the book. While Bolin expounds upon the new markets and mass audiences created by the iPhone, Perren and Petruska are able to

demonstrate how media corporations are attempting to capitalize on these new audiences. In the latter chapter the authors recap how companies such as ABC, Comcast, and HBO are all working to avoid the same fate of the music industry's CD market. The authors conclude that currently, the media distribution world is characterized by "confusion and chaos" (p. 117).

In "Pushing the (Red) Envelope," Chuck Tryon examines streaming content distribution on mobile platforms. Tryon does not limit his chapter to strictly Netflix—other companies such as Redbox, Hulu, HBO On Demand, and Amazon are also discussed. The chapter raises interesting questions surrounding concepts of "cord cutting," wherein consumers opt out of paying for cable television in favor of online streaming or DVD by mail services. Chapter 9, "Platforms, Pipelines, and Politics: The iPhone and Regulatory Hangover" by Jennifer Holt, takes on the pressing need of lawmakers to create new policies in light of technological convergence. Policy makers are unable to keep up with the fast pace of technological developments, which Holt refers to as the "regulatory hangover" (p. 141). The author documents the relationships between network carriers and manufacturers, with particular attention given to the AT&T/Apple relationship.

"A Walled Garden Turned Into a Rain Forest" by Pelle Snickars concludes the section on politics and redistribution. Snickars explains how Apple exhibits such tight control over their devices as well as the app store. While Apple may be characterized as an open platform because it offers developers the tools to create apps,

Apple is in actuality a closed platform due to their strict control over app creation and marketing. Snickers argues that this strict exercising of control is essential to Apple's success.

Section III, "The App Revolution," is probably the most diverse section despite the title. The section is composed of five chapters whose topics range from iPhone app games to citizen journalism. In chapter 11, "The iPhone Apps: A Digital Culture of Interactivity," Barbara Flueckiger traces the history of iPhone app development. Similar to the previous chapter, Flueckiger also concludes that while the software development kit (SDK) is open, Apple is still a restrictive and closed system.

Most iPhone users are familiar with *Angry Birds*—the surprisingly addictive game wherein users slingshot birds at helmet-wearing pigs garrisoned within various structures. Mia Consalvo investigates *Angry Birds* as a case study of how games are redefined on the mobile platform in "Slingshot to Victory: Games, Play, and the iPhone." Consalvo asserts that the success of *Angry Birds* and similar mobile games has normalized play in society and created a new audience distinct from the "core gamer" (p. 193). In chapter 13, "Reading (with) the iPhone," Gerard Goggin makes a cogent argument that among the multiple e-readers of today, the iPhone was incidentally the first viable one. Goggin traces a history of e-readers from Amazon's Kindle and Barnes & Noble's Nook. The main premise of the chapter is that upon the iPhone's release, Apple never really emphasized the e-reading capabilities of the gadget but users nonetheless appropriated it as a reader. Janey Gordon uses

the 2009 "miracle on the Hudson" event to illustrate the recent merger of citizens into citizen journalists in "Ambient News and the Para-iMojo: Journalism in the Age of the iPhone". When the Airbus conducted an emergency landing on the Hudson River a nearby ferry passenger had the foresight to snap a picture of the evacuation with her iPhone. Gordon argues that this moment "crystallized" the changing landscape of journalism (p. 212). The chapter concludes with some insights on the good and bad associated with the journalism shift.

Chapters 15, "Party Apps and Other Citizenship Calls", and 16, "The iPhone's Failure: Protests and Resistance," examine political and social activism as mediated by the iPhone and the iPhone applications. Ana Koivunen delineates how political parties and media networks utilize apps, as well as how Swedish print journalism frames social media. Oliver Leistert argues that the iPhone "fails as a protester's device" because of the closed source nature of the company (p. 239). Protesters prefer to use a phone that allows more control over the software and hardware.

Section IV, "Mobile Lives," concerns the mediated everyday of the mobile life. In "iPhone, I Learn," Anne Balsamo states that the iPhone is more than just a communication device, it is "a prosthetic extension of my corporeal being" (p. 252). Balsamo also provides that the iPhone opens up new modes of learning. Practically every user of an Apple product is guilty of scrolling through the end-user licensing agreement (EULA) and inadvertently clicking agree before reading the text. Lane Denicola takes the EULA and other Apple aspects as topic

in “Eula, Codec, API: On the Opacity of Digital Culture.” The author coins the term “dark culture” to describe the EULA, codec, and API, because it is not yet fully understood and difficult to investigate due to its complex nature. The conclusion of this chapter entails an interesting “Maker’s Bill of Rights” with bullets such as “Batteries should be replaceable” and “Torx is OK; tamperproof is rarely OK” (p. 275).

In “The Back of Our Devices Looks Better Than the Front of Anyone Else’s: On Apple and Interface Design,” Lev Manovich analyzes the evolution of design between the 1998 iMac and 2007 iPhone. The title of the chapter is borrowed from a braggadocious Apple advertisement touting the sleek design of the iMac. Manovich details how interaction and “aesthetics of disappearance” have come to characterize the tech company (p. 279).

The use of mobile devices for music production, specifically the Ocarina app for the iPhone, is the main interest of Frauke Behrendt in chapter 20, “Playing the iPhone.” Behrendt does an excellent job of documenting cases of mobile music projects and sound artwork before focusing on the Ocarina app. The chapter details how mobile technological aspects of the app define it as a “*web phenomenon* of pop culture” (p. 293).

Mark Deuze and The Janissary Collective pen chapter 21, “Mobile Media Life.” The authors begin with a discussion on the ubiquity and pervasiveness of media and their invisible nature; that is, until they fail to work properly. The chapter also compiles concepts from Friedrich Kittler, Daniel Miller, Rich Ling, and Jonathan Donner, to name a few. The

main premise of the chapter is that our devices are so seamless in day-to-day life that media become us just as we become like our media (p. 307).

Dalton Conley concludes the book with the critical cultural essay “The End of Solitude.” Conley cautions that the pervasiveness of technology is eroding away the richness of face-to-face interaction, as well as causing a decline in solitude and individualism. The conclusion raises several interesting concepts such as the irony of more digital connectivity leading to less actual intimate connections.

A strong point of the book is that it mainly focuses on one singular piece of technology. Rather than a broad compilation of smartphone technology studies, *Moving Data* focuses mainly on the iPhone’s place within the mobile world. I would, at the same time, caution the prospective reader regarding my previous commendation. While most chapters focus solely on the iPhone, it’s easy to lose sight of the iPhone’s relationship in other chapters. A reader may delve into a chapter expecting to read exclusively about the iPhone only to find the chapter is much broader in nature. For example, Bolin’s entry, “Personal Media in the Digital Economy,” is an insightful look at how mobile technologies open up new marketing opportunities; however, this chapter is very immense and seems to concern smartphones on the whole rather than just the iPhone. This is not to say the chapter is without merit, topics within are still applicable to the iPhone—Bolin simply has a wider frame of reference.

Moving Data is well written and easy to comprehend, making this a great aid to both graduate and undergraduate level instructors. At several moments the topics

were so interesting that the urge to put the book down and research something mentioned within the chapter was overwhelming. Midway through chapter 11, I found myself downloading Apple's software development kit in an attempt to learn more about open source application development. Additionally the book features a bibliography and extensive index helping to make this a great companion to a researcher interested in a specific topic. As with many technology books, unfortunately the content can become a bit

dated while moving through the research and publishing timeline. This is certainly no fault of the book's editors or authors, but a potential reader should note most discussion of the iPhone is from the 4s model and prior. In summation, this text will prove valuable for technology scholars and those wishing to gain alternate points of view on Apple and the iPhone.

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