
The title of this engaging and provocative edited volume playfully inverts the classical expression *deus ex machina*. This Latin translation of the Greek expresses the frustration of critics (dating back to Aristotle) with dramatists who provide insubstantial resolutions to their plays. It also arguably expresses a deeper mistrust of machines themselves, expressing that tools made by human hands are not appropriate settings for divine irruptions. With the turn of phrase *deus in machina*, editor Jeremy Stolow invites a revision of the “supposition that religion and technology exist as two ontologically distinct arenas of experience, knowledge, and action” (2). To counter this commonsensical notion, this book presents a conversation among scholars from anthropology, communication studies, media archaeology, and religious studies on the possibility of overlaps in these categories and what might be gained (or lost) in this imaginative shift.

In his excellent introduction, Stolow notes that two scholarly discussions serve as foundations for this book. While scholars of religion have increasingly recognized the entanglement of religious practice and imagination with media and mediation, those of science, technology, and media have similarly engaged with the sacral and magical dimensions of technoscientific knowledge and practice. In a sense, this book represents a productive confluence of this material turn in religious studies and a corresponding spiritual turn in technology studies; it is a place where two streams’ mingled currents marry the students of their respective headwaters.

According to Stolow, this book seeks to undermine two interrelated modes of thought: first, instrumentalist frameworks that consider technology to be the handmaiden of religious goals, and second, the widespread association of “technology with the ‘merely mechanic’—as opposed to the ‘poetic’—realm of thought and experience” (11). In their stead, Stolow calls for the readers to abandon themselves to a world of human/nonhuman hybrids (15). At points in this book, such hybrids seem to be the norm. Consider the Ghanaian preacher accused of attempting to use a machine to deceive his ministry into believing that he was passing on the Holy Spirit in the form of electric current (in Marleen de Witte’s chapter, which applies some of the questions about acoustical technologies from Leigh Schmidt’s *Hearing Things* to the tactile dimension). Or consider the “magnetic cord” (a rope covered with wires) that the U.S. Spiritualist Andrew Jack-sen Davis proposed séance-goers use to attract and communicate with spirits (featured in Stolow’s own “The Spiritual Nervous System”). Both provoke readers to recognize the possibilities of technologies, elaborate or mundane, to provide actors with possibilities to connect with the transcendent.

In a conscious effort to offer a corrective to the heavy bias toward Euro-American Christianity in prior studies of religion and technology, this volume makes considerable efforts to consider non-Western and non-Christian contexts. Indeed, the section entitled “Bio-Power” is composed of three chapters that each focus on the interaction between “the religious imagination that lies buried in the contours of modern biopolitics” (21), and non-Christian subjects working to re-imagine their religious identities and practices in relation to those technologically-mediated topographies. Faye Ginsberg analyzes a transnational group of Ashkenazi Jewish documentary filmmakers who portray disability within the Jewish community, Sherine Hamdy examines debates over kidney transplants among Muslims in a contemporary
Egyptian hospital, and Jason Josephson describes the transformation of Japanese Buddhist healing prayer rituals from being therapeutic technologies to a social “disease” infecting the body politic. And the book’s final two chapters each deal with issues of digital media at the margins of Euro-American hegemony: Maria José de Abreu describes a multimedia campus in São Paulo that Catholic charismatics share with a group of mystical Franciscan monastics, while Alexandra Boutros presents online communities of Haitian Vodou practitioners and Vodou’s unexpected presence in William Gibson’s cyberpunk fiction.

In addition to its varied content, this volume is also commendably diverse in terms of methodology and style. Richly-detailed ethnographies, far-reaching histories, and deep-diving cultural studies are cheek by jowl. Such juxtapositions are embodied in the first two body chapters, both about the logistical technologies of timekeeping. John Durham Peters’ expressive “Calendar, Clock, Tower,” with its almost stream-of-consciousness aphorisms [e.g., “[Clocks] are compasses whose needle points to the now rather than to the north” (32)] is followed by Wolfgang Ernst’s hyper-analytical “Ticking Clock, Vibrating String” [e.g., “What alphabetic writing accomplished for the phonetic stream of speech, the wheeled clock achieved for time: a radical individuation, a core of occidental combinatory rationality” (60)]. The intersections of issues of religion and technology in literature are also dealt with in a widely variegated fashion, with Peter Pels engaging the evolution of sacramental technologies in science fiction and John Lardas Modern dealing with the aesthetic and religious uses of Melville, particularly *Moby Dick*.

While this interdisciplinary, heteroglossic approach opens the conversation to diverse voices, it also opens it up to inconsistencies in theoretical frameworks. For example, in his chapter on the detachment of the oscillating clock from its religious origins in medieval European monasteries, Ernst writes that his “media-archaeological method … is intended to keep [religion and technology] apart and distinct” (45). Like a few of the other authors in this volume (from both within and without the discipline of religious studies), Ernst here seems to accept “religion” as an unproblematic universal category rather than to recognize it as a peculiarly post-Reformation European invention, as Stolow does so expertly in the introduction (18).

Such qualms aside, this book is clear, challenging, and—so rare in academic writing as a whole, but especially in the genre of the edited volume—a delightful read. Its introduction would work well in either a graduate or advanced undergraduate seminar on religion and material culture, and a number of the chapters would fit in a variety of other pedagogical contexts.

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Belief in the Trinity is perhaps the foundational expression of Christian faith. Throughout history, and in the world today, millions have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Yet what is at stake in a triune conception of God remains nebulous to many people. Common appropriations of the Trinity are often analogical—focusing on comprehension of a