



COVER SHEET

Foth, Marcus (2007) Willson, Michele A., Technically Together: Rethinking Community within Techno-Society. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy (MIA)* 123.

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Willson, Michele A., *Technically Together: Rethinking Community within Techno-Society*

Book Review for Media International Australia, No. 123, May 2007

Willson, Michele A., *Technically Together: Rethinking Community within Techno-Society*, Peter Lang Publishing, New York, 2006, ISBN 0 8204 7613 7, viii+250 pp.

The term 'community' continues to be a cameleonic concept. It undergoes a range of appropriations and apparently flexible interpretations to accommodate a variety of contexts and rhetorical and epistemological needs. Additional complexity is added by the interplay between the dynamic nature of community formations and technology. However, tidying up this mess with a single and universally applicable definition or theory of 'community' is not satisfactory either, for the process of finding the greatest common denominators – 'people' and 'commonality' – strips the concept of its utility and meaning. Disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy and media and communication studies operate with sometimes differing, sometimes overlapping understandings of 'community'.

Recognising these tensions, Willson sets out to position and review key philosophical contributions to the nexus of community and technology and assess their ability to explain social formations in contemporary techno-society. The book is divided into two sections. The first section establishes the analytical framework which comprises two sets of considerations of community. First, Willson's subjective considerations entail a discussion of bonding, commonality, reciprocity and recognition, and identity in community. Second, her structural considerations distinguish between traditional, modern, and post-modern community forms. Exploring the impact of technology on different forms of existence of community, the second and third chapter introduce and refine three ontological categories: presence, abstraction and embodiment; knowledge; and the extension or compression of time and space.

The second section of the book applies this framework to analyse the community theories of Charles Taylor, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Mark Poster. Willson discusses the approach to community by each of these social commentators followed by structural and subjective considerations. Each chapter concludes with an evaluation of the contribution each theorist makes to an explanation of the interrelationship between community and technology. One of the key issues Willson focuses on is intersubjectivity, especially the dilemma between a need to account for individual difference whilst recognising integrative communal conditions.

An imminent critique of Willson's work assesses the purpose and the outcomes of the book on its own terms. In this respect I found the book to be a thorough and sophisticated monograph which succeeds at what it set out to achieve. Recent studies have contributed little to the development of theoretical perspectives, concepts and models suitable for guiding further empirical research into the interplay between community and technology. I thus admire Willson's courageous accomplishment to publish a monograph 'situated within the realm of the abstract' (p. 226) in times when theory development is increasingly facing neglect and often comes second to empirical and applied research and development.

Yet my transcendental critique of Willson's book is consistent with her own final remarks: "It is vital that any discussion of community recognizes that ultimately it is the concrete realization and practice of our relations with Others that form the motivating impetus for such examinations" (p. 226). The book fails to deliver on this premise of drawing philosophy closer to reality by attempting to merge theory and practice.

Dr Marcus Foth, Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology,
m.foth@qut.edu.au