

Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age. By Tiziana Terranova. London, UK: Pluto Press, 2004. 184 pp. ISBN 0745317480.

There have been numerous texts written in the aftermath of the dot.com crash that have reinterpreted the crippling economic collapse with critical hindsight. Such texts tend to re-evaluate the euphoric energies that built Silicon Alley and Valley and re-situate the utopian visions of the new economy in an attempt to comprehend what went wrong. Tiziana Terranova's 2004 work *Network Culture* is written at a post-dot.com conjuncture, when e-mail, discussion groups, e-zines, and blogs are everyday informational tools used *en masse*. In this respect, Terranova is not concerned with any one historical event; she is not engaged in an analysis of a singular juncture in the history of information technology. Instead, Terranova is concerned with the "terrain of the common," an aspect of contemporary culture that "arises out of affective investments and works through an inventive and emotive political intelligence on the . . . terrain of the contemporary politics of communication" (p. 157). Moreover, Terranova's interest in the terrain of the common is tied to a specific cultural formation she terms "network culture," which she observes to be "characterized by an unprecedented abundance of information output and by an acceleration of informational dynamics" (p. 1).

Proposing that the book is "an attempt to give a name to, and to further our understanding of, a global culture as it unfolds across a multiplicity of communication channels but within a single milieu" (p. 1), Terranova builds a theoretical platform, in the Deleuzian and Bergsonian tradition, from physics and biology, computing and cybernetics, and philosophy, privileging process over structure and non-linearity over linearity. Accordingly then, the title of the book, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*, is somewhat misleading. Instead of interrogating the relations of power governing information technology and practices surrounding the Internet, Terranova is more concerned with the processes and the non-linear sequence of events that have assembled into this cultural moment she defines as network culture.

The book is organized into five chapters: 1) Three Propositions on Informational Clusters; 2) Network Dynamics; 3) Free Labour; 4) Soft Control; and 5) Communication Biopower. The chapters, which are subdivided into sections, overflow with material groundings and theoretical frameworks to support Terranova's description of network culture. The first chapter offers a historical analysis of information theory, highlighting the foundational theorists and their works, with a focus on the innovations carried out at the Bell Labs during the 1940s and 1950s. The second and third chapters provide a contemporary examination of network culture, focusing on the material and socio-economic conditions that developed over the last 30 years. In particular, chapter 2 discusses the key moments in the structural evolution of the Internet, and chapter 3 interrogates the fundamental arguments surrounding the concepts of "knowledge worker" and "free labour" in the digital economy. Chapter 4, much like chapter 1, relies heavily on theoretical underpinnings rather than on material examples; it details the evolution of biological computation or emergent intelligence and self-controlling systems, such as cellular automata. Finally, chapter 5 traces the relationship between the intensification of communication and the emergence of the masses, which Terranova refers to as social entropy.

Of particular importance in *Network Culture* is Terranova's exploration of the meaning of information, arguing against the common assumption of information as the content of communication. She interrogates information in relation to network culture, suggesting that information is no longer characterized by the transmission of something from a source to a receiver. Instead, she argues, information should be conceived of as informational dynamics: "the relation between noise and signal, including fluctuation and microvariations, entropic emergencies and negentropic emergences, positive feedback and chaotic

processes” (p. 7). Terranova argues that qualities attributed to contemporary culture should be conceived of as informational. As informational processes increasingly take on attributes of information, it is only proper to conceive and perceive of these processes in terms of their informational dynamics (p. 7). To support her claim, Terranova explores three themes on informational cultures: information and noise, limits of possibility, and non-linearity and representation.

The fact that Terranova dedicated an entire chapter to information theory is somewhat surprising given that it is not integrated into the rest of the book. For example, the author outlines in great detail C. E. Shannon and W. Weaver’s “Mathematical Theory of Communication,” to the point that it appears as though this text will be fundamental to the entire book, yet it is only briefly mentioned again nearly 50 pages later. The lack of congruence between chapters becomes one of the fundamental flaws of this work. Even though Terranova specifies in her introduction that she privileges non-linearity, she nonetheless maintains a certain level of linearity, as the chapters follow a loose, yet evident, historical timeline. Moreover, the fact that Terranova manages to fit an incredible amount of rather intricate theoretical detail into 157 pages suggests that her work is not geared toward a complete and working definition of network culture, as it is more of an attempt to think through the concept of network culture. For the reader to critically assess the concepts Terranova presents, however, requires a sophisticated comprehension of the theoretical frameworks at hand.

All the same, to dismiss *Network Culture* for being heavily infused with diverse theories is to miss the value of the work. The text offers valuable insights and points of departure for thinking through fundamental concepts in communication studies. For example, in her analysis of free labour in the digital economy (chapter 3), Terranova does not merely isolate the phenomenon in relation to the digital economy; rather, she questions the meaning of this type of “free” experience in relation to the cultural economy at large. Terranova offers a compelling argument supporting the idea that free labour is not restricted to the Internet or digital economy, and that it is instead an important, yet still unacknowledged, source of value in advanced capitalist societies. Terranova’s observations point to the possibility that the digital economy is a working model for the future of capitalist production.

Also of importance to communication studies is Terranova’s argument for a new medium of communication that is freed from “old media” baggage (p. 135). This, for Terranova, is encompassed in a “networked multitude,” which possesses its own means of communication and is freed from the tyranny of broadcasting—and is therefore able to “challenge the phony public sphere of television and the press” (p. 135). Yet this is not accomplished by separating and opposing network culture to that of the manipulated “mass” (p. 150). More importantly, there is a mass in network culture, “as well as segments and microsegments, and an informational dimension that links them all” (p. 153). Thus, Terranova does not argue for the eradication of “old media.” Rather, she proposes networked multitudes as a point of departure for critically re-examining traditional concepts upheld by old media, such as the public sphere, democracy, and mass culture, in an attempt to emerge forth onto the terrain of the common, that is, “the constituent terrain of the contemporary politics of communication” (p. 157).

As a philosophical investigation into the emergence of network culture, *Network Culture* manages to accomplish what Terranova sets out to do, which is to “give a name to, and to further our understanding of, a global culture as it unfolds across a multiplicity of communication channels but within a single milieu” (p. 1). The author demonstrates that network culture is not an isolated instance that begins and ends with the digital economy. Following in the tradition of such scholars as Adrian Mackenzie, Luciana Parisi, and Brian Massumi, Terranova attempts to bridge the gap between theories of emergence and contemporary culture. She is preoccupied with demonstrating that network culture is neither situ-

ated in the past nor in the future, but is constituted by what occurred prior to its contemporary form and will therefore affect the emergence of its future form. Perhaps, then, the book could have more appropriately been titled “Networking Culture: Affective Politics for the Emergent Information Age.”

Andrea Zeffiro
Concordia University