

degree to which Ellul's ideas form a part of this school of media studies. It is to be hoped that the essays in this volume will help encourage further dialog and provoke continued scholarship that accomplishes the Forum's goals.

Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix

by Paul A. Taylor and Jan Harris

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Digital Matters: The Theory and Culture of the Matrix is one of those books where the title says everything. In the first place, *digital matters* is a deliberate oxymoron, pregnant with ambiguity. It denotes, on the one hand, a concern with the subject matter of digital technology and culture. And in indicating this, the phrase inevitably calls to mind the essential immateriality that has been the subject of so much theorizing about new media technology and computer systems. Being digital, as individuals like Nicholas Negroponte have argued, is all about a transformation from the antiquated culture and slow-moving economy of atoms—large, heavy, and inert masses—to a new world of weightless and ephemeral bits of information that circulate through global networks at the speed of light.

On the other hand, *digital matters* can also be interpreted in a much more literal and material sense. In this way, the title names the inescapable and often ignored material circumstances (e.g. the working and living conditions of individuals involved in chip manufacturing, the unequal distribution of and access to information technology, the environmental impact of toxic waste from discarded IT components) that make the digital and its utopian promises of immateriality possible in the first place. *Digital Matters* is a book that not only plays on this double meaning but, most importantly, demonstrates how and why the material conditions of digital technology do in fact matter for all things digital. In this way, the book identifies and critically examines techno-culture's *im/materiality*, a neologism introduced by Taylor and Harris in order to name and give expression to this complex issue.

Second, the subtitle deploys and trades on the polysemia that has accrued to the word "matrix." Clearly the immediate reference for many readers will be the Wachowski brother's cinematic trilogy, not just because of the films' popularity but also because of the numerous academic books and articles that have offered interpretations of the narrative's social and philosophical significance. *Digital Matters*, although employing these pop-culture materials as a recognizable point of departure, does not mount a direct critical assault on the film and its interpretations. Instead Taylor and Harris address the trilogy indirectly by investigating the larger cultural and theoretical matrices that already inform, animate, and structure the im/material ideology that is articulated by this particular techno-myth.

For this reason, *Digital Matters* understands and deploys "matrix" in the full range of its multifarious meanings, including: environment that shapes, supporting structure of organic form, signal transposition, and the place of reproduction. Understood in this way, Taylor and Harris's investigation can be categorized as an innovative and more sophisticated articulation of *media ecology*, where media technology does not just frame new social environments but innovations in technology are also situated in and informed by a socio-cultural matrix that already shapes and informs

technical developments. In other words, *Digital Matters* tracks down and examines both the social and cultural material in which digital technology has developed and the very real social and cultural environments that this immaterial information helps to create.

In order to get at this, Taylor and Harris marshal an impressive array of theorists, many of whom are not usually considered part of the official pantheon of cyberstudies and new media technology. Instead of concentrating on the work of self-stylized techno-theorists like Lev Manovich, Nicholas Negroponte, N. Katherine Hayles, et al., Taylor and Harris turn their critical eye toward Jacques Ellul, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Kittler, Michel de Certeau, and Walter Benjamin. This is not just an exercise in "old school" theorizing. Instead Taylor and Harris demonstrate how these thinkers' ideas already structure our understanding of digital technology and how they might be repurposed to introduce innovative methods for critically rewiring the matrix of our technological present. Consequently, *Digital Matters* does not simply apply, for example, Ellul's work to digital technology, but opens up a critical dialogue between Ellul's theorizing and contemporary media *praxis* that has the effect of transforming both. In the final analysis, *Digital Matters* is a remarkable book that pushes the envelope in new media theory. It should be of interest to anyone concerned with media, technology, and contemporary theory.

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