In sum, *Digital Media Influence* includes a series of critical arguments in support of using cultivation theory for digital media research without ignoring the historically quantitative applications of the theory. As such, this book could introduce cultivation theory to a variety of scholars interested in the sociocultural influences of digital media. In particular, the diverse use of current examples strengthened this book’s argument. If the book was solely limited to a narrative of George Gerbner, it would have fallen short of its goal of inspiring cultivation’s use in digital media research. In addition, the historical approach used in this book to deconstruct cultivation theory also acts as a rough blueprint for revisiting other evergreen media effect theories in alternative methodological contexts. Another possible case study, for example, could be to pick apart the evolution of Albert Bandura’s “social cognitive theory” (Bandura, 1971, 1986), wherein one could investigate the funding that supported the theory, the institutional effects on and because of the theory, and any possible alternative methodological contexts in the application of the theory in digital media research. By drawing upon the arguments made in this book, readers may be better equipped to address a wider range of important issues relating to digital media influence.

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Paris Marx, *Road to Nowhere: What Silicon Valley Gets Wrong about the Future of Transportation*. Verso Books: London, 2022; 272 pp.; ISBN 9781839765889, £14.99 (hbk)

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Popular tech criticism came back with a vengeance in the 2010s. After we realised that dictatorships wouldn’t be toppled through tweets, Morozov (2013) coined the term ‘solutionism’, and Cambridge Analytica opened the door to the Techlash soon thereafter. A podcasting scene emerged out of this conjecture, with shows like *Trashfuture* and *This Machine Kills* spearheading a left-leaning critique of Silicon Valley and its admirers. These self-professed luddites combine satire with a heartfelt plea to develop political solutions to our current compounding crises, rather than new tech fixes.

*The Road to Nowhere: What Silicon Valley Gets Wrong about the Future of Transportation* applies this intellectual project to the tech industry’s approaches to urban mobility. Journalist and podcaster Paris Marx, whose own show, *Tech Won’t Save Us*, has amassed a considerable following, persuasively argues that Silicon Valley’s approach to
transportation reproduces the same car-centric bias that characterised American life for the last century, without addressing any of its harms. Against a technological dystopia entrenching extractivism, social dislocation and class disparities, they argue for a fundamental political change that democratises the process of decision-making, rather than hiding traditional power structures behind apps and platforms.

Marx sets the terms of the discussion in the first two chapters of the book, devoted to the history of the American automobile and tech industries, respectively. They stress the similarities between the two, regarding both industries’ reliance on public funding, and their embrace of technological determinist narratives which depoliticise their interests. The car-centric approach to urban design, that flourished around the United States from the 1930s onwards, heavily relied on public funds, in the same way that Silicon Valley’s innovations were made possible through heavy federal investment in digital infrastructures. However, these policies are seldom presented as political choices, instead being framed as naturally occurring phenomena in America’s road to progress. Doing so externalises the worst effects of these developments, be it the systemic enclosure of the Internet into a succession of data-collection services, the exploitative ethos of both industries or, perhaps more viscerally shocking, the naturalisation of the over 50,000 people dying of car-related causes in the United States every year.

Having established the general background, Marx then moves to concrete examples of Silicon Valley’s take on mobility, starting with the electric car. A symbol of individual consumption in the green economy, electric cars have long been a staple of liberal ecologism. This perspective ignores the heavily extractive logics underpinning their production, which include the usage of child labour in the cobalt mines of the DRC (p. 73), or the desertification of large swaths of land in Latin America (p. 75). The cruel irony of it all is that the electric vehicle’s ecological impact is only marginally better than internal combustion cars, and its implementation does not solve the atomisation and alienation emerging from car-centric infrastructure. Similar dynamics can be identified in Uber, the subject of chapter 4, which claimed that its ride-hailing platform would ‘reduce personal vehicle ownership [and] cut traffic congestion’ (p. 94). None of these promises came to fruition. Instead, the platform multiplied the cars on the street by refusing to cap the number of drivers, which in turn put further pressure onto the workers, who saw their conditions systemically worsen. Despite these ruthless practices, Uber was incapable of turning to profit, as its corporate structure proved to be too expensive for a glorified taxi company. Still, it remains a highly useful lobbying tool for the bourgeoisie, leading pushes to deregulate the labour market, with California’s Proposition 22 being the clearest example to date.

These two chapters are the strongest part of the book, aptly identifying the utopian narratives concerning the future of transportation and the cruel reality hiding behind it. Marx then moves to an examination of ideas that are yet to be implemented, losing the rabid materialism that had propelled the analysis so far. Chapter 5 zooms on the promises of self-driving vehicles, which are far from becoming a reality, but that would require a thorough reinfrastructuralisation of the city, if they ever were to materialise. The same can be said about the underground tunnels of The Boring Company and Uber’s flying cars, which occupy chapter 6. Finally, chapter 7 is devoted to ‘the coming fight for the sidewalk’ (p. 160), describing how dockless ridesharing solutions and autonomous
delivery robots are both premised on the idea that pedestrian parts of the city are largely useless spaces. Ultimately, all of these are examples of far-fetched solutionist perspectives, refusing to see that the problems they claim to solve ‘can be effectively addressed through low-tech means, but that will require engaging with the politics of transportation and the distribution of benefits and harms that arise from both the existing system and the proposals for the future’ (p. 132).

Marx needs to engage with these pie-in-the-sky visions in preparation for the last part of the book, which return to the question of what lies ahead. Having dispelled Silicon Valley’s self-aggrandising myths, they put forward ‘three future scenarios that are far more realistic and illustrate the world that is being created’ (p. 187). (1) The Gated Greenwashed City, a segregated urban structure where the rich can live an eco-responsible fantasy without having to interact with the deprived communities sustaining their lifestyles. (2) The City Without Pedestrians, the progressive elimination of pedestrian spaces in increasingly car-centric cities. (3) The City of Algorithmic Control, where the affordances of the urban space are remoulded to facilitate the capture and exploitation of personal data. Some aspects of all three scenarios can already be seen in our cities, but it does not have to be this way. The book’s last chapter outlines a different vision for the city of tomorrow, one that embraces ‘more mundane technologies that have stood the test of time – for instance the bicycle, the bus, and the train’ (p. 207). Crucial to this vision is the repolitisation of the city alongside democratic imperatives, allowing collective decision-making and community-led initiatives to replace the supposedly apolitical designs of privileged industry leaders that seek to reproduce their own class interests above all. This is a vision I can get behind.

The Road to Nowhere’s effective dismantling of high-tech narratives is a valuable contribution to contemporary debates. The chapter on Uber, for instance, is one of the best examples of applied Labour Process Theory I have seen, showing the shallowness of the company’s promises and its nefarious effects for workers across the labour market. Yet, I was disappointed by the lack of clear distinction between actually existing urban changes propelled by Silicon Valley and instances of financial engineering (e.g. Uber’s desperate bid to preserve their stock valuation by talking about flying cars). The latter occupy a sizable part of the book, while platforms effectively remodelling urban transportation, like Gorillas or Instacart, are barely mentioned. Perhaps more saliently, Marx is not interested in developing a theory of urban change. They put forward a post-capitalist vision of the city, while endorsing social-democratic initiatives, like the Green New Deal or the Pacto Ecosocial del Sur, that will never usher the change they are dreaming of. Readers of The Road to Nowhere will know that Silicon Valley’s future is not particularly desirable, but the path towards better transport structures remains uncharted.

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