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changing relationships in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries between the diasporic communities and existing (referent-origin) states, if, in fact, those exist and the political, economic, and social uses and effects of such contemporary technologies as the Internet.

Is, then, the term diaspora useful? Dufoix concludes, with that delicate touch of wryness that occasionally informs the text, that it is useful in some respects: to give coherence to a group, or visibility to scholars, but theoretically it is "lifeless." And yet it is not about to disappear soon, if for no other reason that it persists, that it names both "root and rhizome," that it has become "a common noun." Fulfilling a crucial function in clearing the intellectual underbrush, this very short book is invaluable to a host of readers, from the professional to the interested generalist.

Nancy R. Cirillo, *University of Illinois at Chicago*

David J. Gunkel. *Thinking Otherwise: Philosophy, Communication, Technology.* West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 2007.

Thumbs up? Or thumbs down? How does one sum up the review of a book like David J. Gunkel's *Thinking Otherwise: Philosophy, Communication, Technology*? If the arguments Gunkel forwards in his series of essays on the discursive logics surrounding new media technologies are persuasive, a thumbs up/thumbs down approach may be misguided. In looking at new media discourses and unveiling some of the assumptions and histories behind them, Gunkel aims to dislodge the entrenched, dichotomous terms used to discuss new media technologies and how they shape our experience of the world. Although unwilling to dismiss these binaries completely, Gunkel hopes that rendering them transparent will open up new possibilities for how we conceptualize and ultimately deploy digital technologies.

In chapter 1, Gunkel adeptly observes that information computing technologies not only function via the binary digits, 0 and 1, but also that their reception and evaluation have been characterized in binary terms as well. New media have typically been welcomed with excited optimism or rejected under suspicious pessimism. These discourses have grounded popular and academic approaches to new media in a way that Gunkel perceives to be problematic. He stresses the importance of questioning these conventional binary discursive logics of new media in order to enhance critique, challenge traditions, and consider ethics.

Gunkel's astute questioning continues throughout the rest of his work. In chapter 2, he engages discourses about the apparent end of the book. Where others have invoked a binary logic in attempting to assess

whether this development is good or bad, Gunkel considers the different question of why so many books on new media explicitly or implicitly address the issue of their materiality. He looks to how these printed materials have dealt with their paradoxical nature by differentiating a material written signifier, the book itself, from the deferred signified, that to which the book refers. This 'solution' generates the Derridean problem of a chain of endless signification that only allows for an indirect engagement with new media technology. Gunkel also argues that this question points to the discursive construction of new media in other media in that what we understand about new media will always already be framed in and by discourses in print, film, television, and everyday conversation. This argument necessarily renders thinking about new media self-reflexive in that we cannot escape the chain of endless signification or the discourses that inform our encounter with them.

Gunkel's third chapter focuses on how binary logics cloud understandings of the new media landscape, those implicated in the familiar notion of the "digital divide." In critiquing the term for its oversimplification, reductionism and the way it entrenches certain power structures, he suggests that we cannot escape its inherent binary form, but must learn "how to use it to question its own limits and exigencies" (73). Gunkel intelligently perceives that unstated technological determinist assumptions undergird discussions of the digital divide, assumptions that should be challenged by theories of social construction and volunteerism alongside historical evidence of the reception and adoption of new technologies.

Chapters 4 and 5 continue the critique of binary structures by using the science fiction film *The Matrix* as a backdrop for considering why escape into electronic media has been compared to hallucinogenic drug use. Gunkel cites recent examples of authors who have made this connection before going back to Plato's *Phaedrus* and explaining how Phaedrus initially offered Socrates the *pharmakon*, or drug of a book, to lure him out of the city. Gunkel sees Plato noting that the medicine and narcotic that is writing has the capacity to create positive and negative effects, but more importantly for Gunkel, enforces the binary of truth and reality as good versus falsity and appearances as bad. These assumptions have been uncritically subsumed within contemporary discussions of the value and use of information computing technologies, assumptions that find expression in Neo's choice of the red pill in the initial stages of *The Matrix* trilogy.

Gunkel's first five chapters raise some considerably interesting questions, but his final chapter may provoke the most discussion. In considering the present state of the increasingly "intelligent" technological Other that is the machine and what or who this machine

may become in the future, Gunkel encourages readers to ask questions about what he calls “the instrumentalist assumptions that have shaped traditional understandings of both communication and technology” (122), assumptions that include a failure to perceive the machine as a potential Other. This instrumentalization renders the machine effectively invisible when it comes to understanding its role in communication. Gunkel argues that the computer serves as more than mere communication medium, but rather as a type of agent in the communicative process. As such, he provocatively suggests that the machine ought to be given increasing consideration as an Other in moral philosophy and that the very notion of personhood be dislodged from its traditional anthropocentric moorings.

One of Gunkel’s strengths comes in his adroit situating of contemporary discussions within a longer philosophical and historical trajectory. Throughout the book, he usefully contextualizes new media comfortably within the philosophy of Plato and Hegel. That Gunkel is more than conversant with other prominent thinkers like Derrida, Peirce, McLuhan, Levinas, and Nietzsche and how their ideas might contribute to our understanding of information computing technologies clearly demonstrates his erudition. Yet, in demonstrating this broad range of knowledge, Gunkel ultimately asks more questions than provides answers. To his credit, he is well aware of this potential difficulty, but some readers may be frustrated by his apparent unwillingness to offer a more neatly packaged solution to the issues his critique reveals. However, those content with queries will find his work a challenging and thought-provoking text.

Does Gunkel’s book receive a thumbs up or thumbs down? He would probably say it is time to move beyond with this ‘digital’ thinking, so in the spirit of his text . . .

Andrew Baerg, *University of Houston, Victoria*

Mark T. Conard. *The Philosophy of Neo-Noir.* Lexington, KY: The UP of Kentucky, 2007. viii + 213 pp.

This volume is a sequel to the 2006 volume *The Philosophy of Film Noir*, which focused on films of the 1940s and 50s renowned for their disorienting cinematic techniques, their inversion of moral values, and their stock of characters haunted by dark secrets in their past. An American form first identified and named by French critics, noir has proven to be highly adaptable to different eras and locales. The present volume surveys a range of films over the past half century which either continue the noir tradition, or adapt the noir sensibility and aesthetic to