La cultura de la conectividad

In recent years a lot has been written regarding the internet and new digital media, some opinions optimistic, others pessimistic or even conciliatory on how they impact our lives. To date there are innumerable case studies on specific social networks such as *Facebook* or *Twitter* – the salient networks of our times – answering questions or theories that quickly become outdated. The comings and goings the new forms of digital media undergo generate new proposals and new challenges as to how to empirically study said proposals; they similarly create new restrictions, their own codes, regulations and operational protocols. There are scant bibliographical options with a broader more comparative outlook on digital media, and said books discuss reflections that go beyond the technological changing of the guard as it were. One particular example of the previous is the book *A Culture of Connectivity: A*

Critical History of Social Media by the well-known Dutch academician Jose van Dijck, originally published in 2013 and recently translated into Spanish by Hugo Salas of the publishing house Siglo Veintiuno.

In the book van Dijck historically analyses how connective media – as he prefers to call them – have molded new forms of sociability based on a financially lucrative connectivity that translates data and metadata into a form of currency. From the quantification and management of said connectivity connective media reinforces principals of constant data sharing, or the pursuit of popularity. The book is divided up into 8 chapters: the first a reader's introduction on how social networks have emerged and how they have made social connections a valuable and ultimately exploitable resource. The second chapter, perhaps what one could consider the most contributive chapter, the

author presents the analytical framework used to analyze connective media, combining two bodies of literature which are at times considered distant to each other; on the one hand studies revolving around economic policy, and on the other, the Actor – network theory. The first is commonly criticized for centering excessively on those that control technology, based on the assumption that users are passive entities subject to governance of companies and their agendas; and the second that leaves aside the underlying political issue of focusing solely on a symmetrical description of networks and the bonds created between society and technology, without considering radical differences in power. The author manages to combine both approaches, inviting the reader to analyze the media in question at a socio-economic level (governance, business models, and property) as well as a socio-technical level (technology, users and habits). In the following chapters the author applies the framework to study different digital platforms and networks such as *Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube*, and *Wikipedia*, positing their dissimilar development and
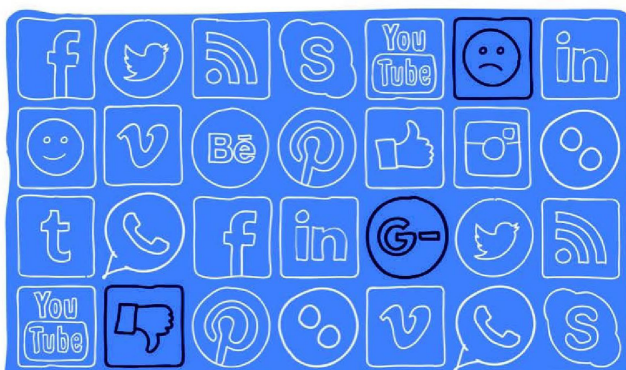
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user versions of the same, user knowledge and social bonds that make up this media platform. In the final chapter of the book the author condenses a historical review of this type of digital media, articulating an analysis of the ecosystem they dwell within and within which they compete in their entirety. It is here that van Dijck suggests we interpret the emergence of these new digital platforms as true microsystems embedded in a "greater economic, political and socio-cultural context", an "ecosystem of connective media" dominated by a limited number of "big fish" and other not so dominant actors, as the author indicates. However, the book does not research the more marginal actors or "small fish" as deeply, actors that coexist in the same ecosystem and struggle for position, bolstered by a critical mass of loyal users, or that ultimately end up eaten whole by the big fish. The book discusses the distinction between connection and connectivity, which leads to interesting ideas and comments relevant to practically all research in the digital era. Van Dijck posits that users turn to these social networks precisely to connect with others, however, these platforms are not neutral and look for ways to exploit these connections. It is in this manner the author reminisces on Michel de Certeau's distinction between tactics and strategy, describing how in each platform in the analysis there are varying strategies employed by the owners of these platforms for reasons pursuant to their own interests, and how the users use their own tactics to negotiate with these private agendas. A issue that may derive from an analysis such as this one is the comparison of both forces in play, or how user tactics may force certain corporate decisions. Although the author gives examples of the phenomena, with significant failures in key functions that were speedily discarded on specific platforms, these were the minority. Certainly there should not be a return to the previous unidirectional model with two clearly opposing parties, where one possesses absolute power, but it must also be noted that there is no balanced bidirectional model that caters equally to the platform owners' goals and the users' needs. If we look at how connective media is used in southern countries such as

Latin America, it is clear to see the radical asymmetry, in which users adhere to a set of regulations and legal framework foreign to them and little understood, as well as algorithmic data processing that is distant to them and opaque. In this area different authors have called attention to new digital rifts that sites like *Facebook* and *Twitter* are in theory generating between the global south and countries in the northern hemisphere (Andrejevic, 2014; Arora, 2016). This requires the inclusion of territorial or geo-political considerations on connective media that go beyond what was initially intended by van Dijck's book. How a culture of "sharing" and the "like" option are managed from Silicon Valley needs further study and analysis as a matter of course, but how that culture is propagated around the globe also needs to be studied, taking into consideration the varying cultural particularities the appropriation of digital media creates in each context. In this sense, no focus is given to how almost all the digital machinations that mold global digital society today originated from a location in the north, nor how this phenomenon is dissimilarly re-appropriated in different spaces – for which there are relevant studies such as Daniel Miller's work in Digital Anthropology (Horst & Miller, 2012; Miller, 2011; Miller et al. 2016).

Beyond these considerations, without doubt *The Culture of Connectivity* is a suggestive book of rigorous analysis, offering the reader a historical and comparative look into the study of digital platforms. Since its first edition it has been the source of much discussion in several other works, and it has re-established the value in analyzing economic policy within the field of studies that trend toward notions of the Web 2.0; notions such as participative, open, and convergent cultures in which little importance is given to socio-technical relations or economic-political interests at play in each of these new forms of digital media.

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