Tero Karppi, Urs Stäheli, Clara Wieghorst, and Lea P. Zierott, **Undoing Networks**, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021, 140 pp., $18.00 (paperback).

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In a world where ubiquitous connection brings fatigue and stimulates people's need to take a break from the shackles of digital technologies, discourses of disconnection have become a recurrent topic. With the negative effects connection has on people's well-being and quality of life, the resistance toward connection has evolved from a political issue into a personal choice (Syvertsen, 2017). To improve the situation of everyday life surrounded by constant connection, the focus of disconnection studies is now more on the practical engagement that enables disconnection, rather than conceiving disconnection as a simple flipside of connection (Moe & Madsen, 2021; Natale & Treré, 2020).

In the book *Undoing Networks*, authors Tero Karppi, Urs Stäheli, Clara Wieghorst, and Lea P. Zierott sustain the trend of disconnection studies by emphasizing how to "undo," which "highlights activities" (p. 11). Interestingly, instead of suggesting practical ways of cutting off links to realize disconnection, the book breaks new ground and extends disconnection studies by challenging the "unhuman and inhuman side" of common networks (p. 18). The focus is "undoing," which is neither with nor against the networks, but dismantling and analyzing the networks in between.

More importantly, with the networks undone, how to take care of individual nodes in the disconnection becomes another focus, showing the human-centric perspectives of the book. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the networks people have long been used to are now undone by physical distancing and isolation. The book states, "In the pandemic, life itself is being protected by disconnection" (p. 15). As a result, when physical disconnection becomes the new norm of life, it is more necessary than ever to think about ways for people to live with disconnection. The book pioneeringly examines what people will face and experience in disconnection. It provides a solid ground for us to question the reasonability of our current networks and to imagine a fresh lifestyle embedded in disconnection.

Following the logic of undoing, each chapter functions individually and invites the reader to "a continuous process of connecting, disconnecting, and reconnecting" (p. 20). While the first and the third chapters take an academic narrative, the second and the fourth chapter divert from scholarly takes. Combining sociological study, industry interview, case analysis, and glossary, the book not only serves academic researchers in the disconnection field as a useful reference but also serves anyone who reflects on overconnection and considers possible practices of disconnection in daily life.
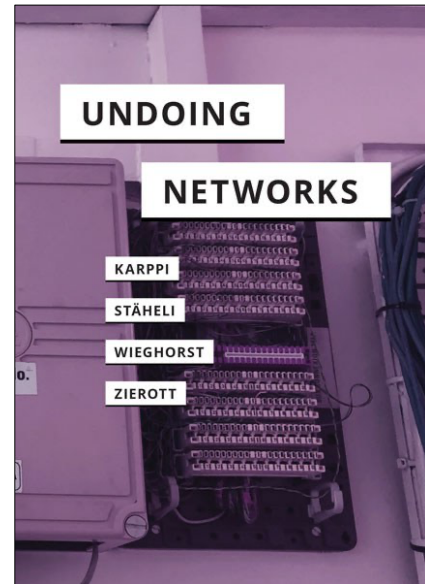
The first chapter by Urs Stäheli outlines practices, tactics, strategies, and politics of undoing networks based on an overview of the development of people's critiques toward overconnection. He traces the idea of disconnection back to people's initial dissatisfaction with overwhelming connection around the 1900s when the appearance of the indifferent attitude and the somnambulist represented the earliest mediums for resisting connection. By showing how the idea of disconnection appeared long before the spread of technologies, Stäheli emphasizes the irrationality of equating the issue of undoing networks with a simple technological idea. He encourages uncovering the "socio-technological impositions that go along with the establishment of connectivity" (p. 30). Through a retrospection of existing propositions of disconnection, Stäheli points out that a common problem of the criticism of connection is the insufficient imaginaries of network culture, because practices of undoing networks are inscribed into "practices and technologies of hyper-connection as its imaginary dimension" (p. 42). Hence, inconspicuous tactics that lie in individual weakness and the inability to connect, and visible strategies that refer to functionalistic concepts to solve the problem of hyperconnection are provided to analyze the directionality of disconnection practices. In the end, to provide a broader exploration of undoing networks, Stäheli suggests imagining disconnection as a collective experience to consider the possible impact disconnection may have on society and politics.

Following the theoretical background of undoing networks discussed in chapter 1, the second chapter, by Lea P. Zierott, exemplifies undoing networks in real-life practices with an interview with Nicole Scheller, a fashion designer. For Scheller, clothing is the way in which she defends herself against omnipresent connections and protects people's privacy from the outside world. What she focuses on is how to confuse algorithms and conceal one's identity by using special patterns and materials for clothes. For example, either putting too much meaningless data on the clothes or embedding infrared light on the clothes can prevent algorithms from recognizing particular people. An interesting point is that the inspiration for her work stems from how current techniques for connection function. By dismantling existing networks, she discovers new possibilities for disconnection based on the face recognition and motion analysis functioning in today's connecting system. From this dimension, her trial responds to the value of Stäheli in the first chapter that the imaginaries of undoing networks lie in a broader understanding of network culture. The example of Scheller can promote our reflection on how to use our work, skills, and social roles to reduce excessive connections. For undoing networks to be a shared experience, it is essential to think of ourselves as "problem solvers looking for potential solutions" (p. 75), as Scheller does.

Another recent example of imagining disconnection on social media is Off-Facebook Activity, which is a tool rolled out by Facebook in 2019 to enable users to disconnect their past activities on Facebook from the account, thus reducing the appearance of personalized targeted advertisements. Nevertheless, Tero Karppi, the author of chapter 3, argues that instead of signifying a productive practice of disconnection, Off-Facebook Activity implies "Facebook's incapability to think above and beyond the dominant images of current connectivity" (p. 79). After a thorough analysis of four videos included on the tool's promotional website, Karppi concludes that the discourses of the Off-Facebook Activity tool nudge people to notice losses rather than the gains in disconnection. What Facebook does is constitute an outside and draw technical borders between the platform, users, and advertisers by disconnecting. In other words, although developed with the intention of empowering users to choose whether to stay in the network, the Off-Facebook Activity tool encourages people to abandon the right to disconnect. This is not surprising given the importance of connection to Facebook's financial revenue from advertising. However, we should be wary of this kind of

manipulation of the discourses of disconnection, which only ironically highlights the value of connection. The Off-Facebook Activity tool limits our imagination of the outside of networks. To explore reasonable definitions of disconnection, an important step is recognizing that "the outside exists external to its relation with Facebook" (p. 99). Karppi outlines how misleading the discourses of disconnection can be without an abundant understanding of network culture.

The book ends with a glossary of disconnection provided by Clara Wieghorst and Lea P. Zierott. The authors map the discourses of disconnection and list some of the recurrent keywords and concepts. For instance, some general concepts such as "information overload," (p. 120) "Internet addiction," (p. 121) and "social distancing," (p. 130) are included to show the social phenomena of connecting fatigue. Other keywords like "dead zones," (p. 108) "no phones allowed," (p. 123) and "digital detox" (p. 110) present empirical cases of disconnection. In light of the wide range of the glossary, the authors highlight the importance of viewing undoing networks as "not merely a technical problem but a social and political one" (p. 106). As the last chapter of the book, the glossary opens new areas for studies of disconnection by concluding what has been and should be discussed. The authors organize the initially isolated concepts to interpret disconnection as an interactive, sociopolitical phenomenon, emphasizing the embeddedness of disconnection in our daily lives.

One of the authors, Karppi, suggests that the four chapters of *Undoing Networks* are "disconnected from each other methodologically and practically" (p. 20). Surprisingly, after a closer examination, it is not difficult to find that the chapters speak with and complement each other. The key idea reiterated throughout the book is to understand disconnection from social and political perspectives. All the chapters give prominence to how a broader imagination of network culture matters in disconnection. Undoing networks is the first step of the long journey toward the realization of disconnection. Hence, the book functions as a supplement to existing discourses of disconnection which focus much on technological issues. However, considering that the prevailing form of connection in today's life is closely related to the Internet and technological devices, we should realize that the avoidance of technical perspective constitutes both the strength and weakness of the book. Although a sociological view is inspiring, it is impossible to neglect the critical role of technologies in networks. A comprehensive understanding of disconnection lies in the intersection of technical and sociopolitical contexts.

References

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