

Oliver L. Haimson, **Trans Technologies**, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2025, 296 pp., \$40.00 (paperback).

Reviewed by  
Jack McLaren  
University of Windsor

At a time when transgender communities suffer sustained rollbacks on their rights and pervasive negative media coverage, Oliver L. Haimson’s book ***Trans Technologies*** offers a balanced yet optimistic overview of how technology can be leveraged to assist these communities. *Trans Technologies* is a groundbreaking and novel examination of the contemporary intersection of transness and technology—what Haimson refers to as trans technology. Haimson successfully balances theory, lived experience, insightful interviews, and the context of the current sociopolitical landscape to offer an overview of trans technologies.

As Haimson notes, trans folks have a sustained and arguably complex relationship with technology—in other words, we generally need it. He argues that “trans people are born via technology” (p. 218), exploring the ways that this holds true. One of the many strengths of this book is its clear and accessible language and wide range of examples. Haimson critically but carefully examines the ambivalent relationship between technology and transness, positioning this tension as a central thread across the chapters. His three main goals are to illuminate the landscape of trans technology, to analyze the various design and funding processes behind it, and to examine how trans people rely on technology and community to meet their basic needs and overcome challenges (p. 6). Haimson emphasizes that trans technologies are most powerful and useful when they join technology and community together (p. 4). As Haimson notes, design processes are often deeply personal and individualistic because trans folks create this tech to deal with sociopolitical and structural problems. However, Haimson’s primary argument is that most of this technology generally serves the most privileged of trans folks rather than the broader community (p. 10). He successfully contextualizes this tendency while advocating for community- and needs-based approaches that better support multiply marginalized trans people.



Through thoughtful interweaving of theory, trans tech creator interviews, and digital ethnography, Haimson teases out the complexity of the relationship between transgender lived experience and technology. He makes it exceedingly clear *why* these topics matter, noting that this technology emerges as a response to oppressive social, legal, and medical conditions of trans existence (p. 5). I appreciated that Haimson is careful to state that trans technology will certainly not fix the structural problems that exist around us. He is very clear on the limits of trans technology and is careful not to overstate the impact that he sees trans technology making. What is more, he allows his trans tech creators to explore the possibilities of trans tech in their own words. I was most impressed with his ability to showcase the potential pitfalls of creating trans technology in isolation while still honoring the important work these creators have done.

*Trans Technologies* is theoretically rich and interdisciplinary, successfully bridging trans studies and human-computer interaction fields. I thank Dr. Haimson for talking about his own positionality in this work, which I believe strengthens it. I also appreciated the thoughtful definition and evolutionary discussion of terms like trans technologies, especially the divide between a practical and theoretical definition: practically, "trans technologies are technologies built or adapted to address the specific concerns and needs of trans people and communities" (pp. 7-8); theoretically, "trans technologies are technologies that embody or support themes or characteristics of transness" (p. 8). The concepts of care, ambivalence, technological separatism, and technological inclusionism are other key terms utilized to frame this book. Building on Hil Malatino's (2020) concept of trans care, Haimson argues that trans technology is one way to practice self-care and to care for one's community (p. 11). Trans care informs the rest of the book, building an optimistic base for how trans folks can help themselves and build a stronger community while tackling the systems that harm us (p. 11).

Each chapter offers a different slice of the "complexities inherent in designing trans technology" (p. 14). After the introduction, chapter 1 provides key framing concepts and offers theoretical grounding. One of Haimson's aims here is to create a definition of trans technology grounded in the perspectives of trans tech creators (p. 35). As Haimson teases out, there is ambivalence in thinking about trans technology as something that is theoretical and also practical. Chapter 2 centers this discussion on ambivalence and considers trans agency, or the ability to take action and do something (p. 55). Haimson explores the different motivations folks have in creating trans technology. Crafting trans technology enables trans folks to have some sort of agency through empowering creators and users, but it does not address the larger structural issues that create the problems trans folks face. The ambivalence, then, is that trans technology is a band-aid for much larger and deeply rooted problems. Yet, this tech still offers a vital way for trans folks to navigate these problems.

Chapter 3 pivots toward discussing privilege, exclusion, and inclusion while designing trans technologies. One of the larger issues here is that the folks most able to design and create trans technology are those who are usually most privileged. This means that multiply marginalized people are often not the users in mind when creating this technology, and so the tech itself could be exclusionary. This chapter dives into the crux of the problem: trans creators often create their products in isolation and as a remedy toward their own problems. While this technology may meet individual needs, Haimson argues that this can lead to the tech not meeting the needs and challenges of the trans community at large, and especially those that are most marginalized.

Chapter 4 tackles the ways trans folks and communities can be involved in the design process. The different design processes outlined in this chapter offer various fascinating ways to go about creating trans tech. Haimson points out that the most impactful design processes are those that involve the community (p. 137). Relatedly, chapter 5 more thoroughly explores the funding contexts in which these technologies are made. Chapter 6 ends on a hopeful note by examining potential futures for trans technology. This final chapter underscores that we need more trans tech, that it matters who is involved in the creation process, and that future trans technology must address the most timely and important needs and challenges that trans folks face (p. 181). One of the key takeaways is that technology helps us imagine new opportunities for trans communities in these challenging times, and trans experiences offer new possibilities for thinking about technologies (p. 218).

While this book is academic facing and speaks to trans studies and HCI (human-computer interaction) scholars, it is written in a very accessible way. As Haimson notes, he intends for this book to be read by “anyone who feels that they cannot fit into a box or that they inhabit multiple contrasting truths at the same time” (p. 9). I believe it would be very accessible to those interested in learning more about trans identity and technology. It would also be good for undergraduate or graduate students, especially those focused on transness and/or digital media. While it might not be perfect for an introduction to these topics, it does add a rich understanding to how transness intersects with technology.

This book does not ignore the dire reality of being trans in current sociopolitical climates, yet it also strikes a hopeful and optimistic tone regarding how trans technology can improve trans lives. Haimson’s honest and clear recognition that trans technology itself cannot substitute for structural change keeps the book from overstating its well-structured and well-argued case for why a discussion of trans technology matters. Haimson offers actionable and clear tips for such direction throughout, and especially in the concluding chapter. *Trans Technologies* serves as a critical and ambitious interrogation of the intersection of transness and technology. It builds on a variety of arguments and literature from both trans studies and HCI, and Haimson offers important theoretical concepts—such as trans technology—that will be integral to both academic fields going forward. While dealing with heavy topics during an increasingly hostile time for trans folks, Haimson manages to offer optimism and actionable advice to readers, practitioners, creators, and academics alike. It is a must read for anyone interested in this material, and I suspect it will become a necessary addition to those interested in transgender justice and technology. I thank Dr. Haimson for his hard work on this project, but also for being willing to share his own journey with his readers.

### Reference

Malatino, H. (2020). *Trans care*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.