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Review of: *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between*, by J. Stolow, ed.

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Deus in Machina consists of 11 essays aimed at correcting the supposition that religion and technology are separate entities by exploring how they have been inter-related in the past and pointing to interdisciplinary ways in which their relationship can be explored today. Media historian Jeffrey Stolow, associate professor in the Department of Communication Studies at Concordia University in Montréal, edited and contributed significantly to this anthology, which originated from a 2007 colloquium held in Hamilton, Canada. In an informative introduction, Stolow underscores the need for engaging religion and technology, which remains "an incomplete task" and requires "documentation, comparison, and above all, reflection" (p. 7). The ensuing essays demonstrate that need and provide various avenues through which interdisciplinary discourse can be stimulated.

Deus in Machina is divided into three sections—Equipment, Bio-Power, and (Re)-Locating Religion in a Technological Age. Each essay is rich in historical background, identifies the current relevance of the topic, and suggests at least implicitly multiple opportunities for interdisciplinary research. Though small sections of prior works were appropriated and/or revised for inclusion in three of the essays, all are published in their entirety for the first time.

As anticipated, the first section focuses on particular instruments and technical processes used in disparate Christian communities that have relevance for apprehending the world. Media historian and social theorist John Durham Peters begins by exploring "Calendars, Clocks, and Towers" as "profound technologies of political and religious power and control" (p. 25). His overview and brief analysis of these technologies lead to recognizing their relevance for new media (e.g., Google) and probing their relationship to religions as "partners and competitors" (p. 42).

In "Ticking Clock, Vibrating String," media theorist Wolfgang Ernst examines the origin and use of the oscillating mechanical clock in monasteries of late medieval Europe. His illuminating discussion shows the continuity between the various manifestations of this technology and the structuring of religious practices. Cultural anthropologist Marleen de Witte focuses on the use of the Electric Touch machine used by some charismatic-Pentecostal pastors to "connect" the individual physically with the divine. Whereas techniques and technology (e.g., music and visual aids) have long been used to facilitate the opening of believers to the presence of their subject of worship, de Witte justifiably judges as a "scam" the Electric Touch machine that enriched the pockets of "media-savvy pastors" while deceiving people into believing they have "supernatural powers" (p. 64). Her exploration of this "human-produced" sensation should alert scholars of media technology and religionists to work together to examine and expose "fake" technologies that are abusive of both technology and religion.

In "The Spiritual Nervous System," Stolow centers on technologies and techniques used by Andrew Jackson Davis and other "Spiritualists" during the latter half of the 19th century and their implications today for identifying the means through which to generate reliable knowledge about "invisible forces that govern the cosmos" (p. 113). Particularly fascinating are Stolow's exploration of Davis's instructions for and use of a "magnetic cord" in séances aimed at communicating with "the spirit world" (p. 83) and his elaborations on telegraphically mediated relationships ("spiritual telegraphy") (p. 93).

The three essays in the Bio-Power section examine technologies and techniques used variously in some Buddhist, Islamic, and Judaic communities. A specialist in Japanese religions, Jason Ānanda Josephson examines the development and practice of Buddhist ritual healing in 19th century Japan. In "Empowered World: Buddhist Medicine and the Potency of Prayer in Japan," he traces the history of the religion-technology "compromise" developed in temples, schools, and law courts over a period of time, which resulted in a fusion of technology and Buddhist ritual in contemporary Japan by building upon the concept of empowerment (*kaji*). Japanese law reinforced by the Supreme Court's decision in 1963 allows prescribed forms of prayer healing today if it *supplements* but does not supplant Japan's Westernized medical system. Sherine F. Hamdy focuses on the "heated debate" in Egypt over the ethics of organ transplantation in "Does Submission to God's Will Preclude Biotechnological Intervention?" Drawing on two years of research of Muslim dialysis patients in Egypt, the anthropologist argues against the dominant supposition that religious fatalism (accepting their

condition as God's will) accounts for refusals to have organ transplants. Hamdy documents other considerations (e.g., efficacy of treatment, value in suffering, problems in medical care, cost of transplants, and responsibility for finding a donor) that should be recognized and understood from the patient's perspective. In "The Canary in the Gemeinschaft? Disability, Film, and the Jewish Question," anthropologist Faye Ginsburg examines documentary films that reverse the stigmatization of the disabled body in the Jewish community. The parables of possibilities in the films to which she points and her own personal experience as the mother of a disabled daughter provide tangible examples for recognizing the inherent dignity of each human, to practice "mediated kinship" (p. 179) and to celebrate the diversity of all bodies.

In the third of this triptych, the essayists strive to define and locate the role of religion in our technological age. Historian of religion John Lardas Modern begins with "Thinking about Melville, Religion, and Machines that Think" by exploring how Protestant communities have responded to the pervasiveness of technologies and especially the way in which they consider the human person in relation to them. For Modern, an appreciation of technology shared by author Lewis Mumford, the Melville Revival, and contributors to the journal *Broom* provides an opportunity to engage in theological discourse. Following Modern's implicit encouragement to continue reflecting theologically on technology is Peter Pels' "Amazing Stories: How Science Fiction Sacralizes the Secular." The anthropologist of Africa insists that science fiction has "*always*" been preoccupied positively or negatively with religion, that recent science fiction has obscured this role, and that science fiction's re-invention of religion to fit the secular experiences of modern people requires rethinking the role of religion today (p. 214). Pels contends that key to this task is a sociocultural, ethnographic analysis of science fiction. Communications' scholar Alexandra Boutros provides in "Virtual Vodou, Actual Practice" a detailed analysis of Vodou online. In this source she finds information about Vodou readily available to the public, misconceptions about this religion dispelled, ritual services booked, and an opportunity to affirm the reputations of specialists. The final essay, "TV St. Claire," cultural anthropologist Maria José A. DeArbeu, evaluates the role of television technology and technique in the production and modulation of a Catholic Eucharistic ritual in which the contemplative Poor Clares participate at Cançã Nova (a multimedia campus in São Paulo, Brazil). Countering the view that contemplatives are inward looking and striving for detachment from society, DeArbeu underscores the outward orientation of the contemplative lives of professed religious that can be observed and experienced through the medium of television.

Clearly, Stolow has collected an impressive group of essays. They may be useful in graduate seminars offered by professors in the humanities, especially theology, religious studies, ethics, and history; in media studies and communications; and in the study of technology. *Deus in Machina* may be most effective when professors of pertinent disciplines collaborate in conducting seminars that provide students with insights on how to relate their disciplines in ways that recognize and respect their data, methods, purviews, limitations, and contributions to the subject for a more comprehensive and helpful understanding. Each chapter provides a plethora of notes with references to scholarly works that are ripe for tapping and advancing research on various aspects of the eleven topics. The opportunities for reflection on the religion-technology relationship and on the ethical implications thereof seem almost endless.