
This is an electronic reprint of the original article.
This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Fridlund, Mats

Review of Gabrielle Hecht, ed. *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War* (MIT Press, 2011)

Published in:

Icon: Journal of the International Committee for the History of Technology

Published: 01/01/2014

Document Version

Other version

Please cite the original version:

Fridlund, M. (2014). Review of Gabrielle Hecht, ed. *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War* (MIT Press, 2011). *Icon: Journal of the International Committee for the History of Technology*, 20(1), 173-74.

This material is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the repository collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone who is not an authorised user.

memories that made the years of Beatlemania so meaningful'. Although he notes that he intends to avoid 'psychology and sociology', in the next sentence he writes of using 'the collective memories of the fans, and ... their hopes and dreams to fill in the spaces between the lines of those wonderful songs' (p. viii). The final chapter immerses us in self-selected memoirists' explanations of the meaning of Beatlemania. Millard's uncritical concluding paragraphs quote Baby Boomer Beatlemaniacs, full of joy and nostalgia. The Beatles and their students deserve better.

Millard's writing is sometimes smoothly well informed, especially on the rise of skiffle and rock 'n' roll in Britain and the Beatles' use of recording technology; at other points it reads like a gloss of a lecture from a survey course. The copyediting is wanting: a spell checker, for example, will not reveal the misuse of 'compliment' (pp. 64, 104). Millard misspells the name of RCA Victor's Steve Sholes, renowned for signing Elvis Presley (p. 66), and gets the year of the Cuban Missile Crisis wrong (p. 145). References are erratic, even for quotations, and difficult to search with only one full citation for each. Six blank pages suggest room for the 'Further Reading' that the volume sadly lacks. The index omits a surprising number of relevant textual references. Finally, there are only three abstract subjects and no entries for the radio, television, film or recording industries or technologies.

*Alexander B. Magoun, IEEE History Center, Stevens Institute of Technology,
Hoboken, New Jersey, USA*

Gabrielle Hecht, ed. *Entangled Geographies: Empire and Technopolitics in the Global Cold War*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011. Pp. 337. £20.95.

The Cold War's entangled material and mental legacies are still working on us and, according to Gabrielle Hecht's introduction, have bearings on 'today's global (dis)order'. *Entangled Geographies* explores 'how Cold War politics, imperialism, and disputes over decolonisation became entangled in technologies' and, in doing this, makes a difference to previous development studies and international history scholarship whose rare discussions of technology 'looks flat' and as 'merely a tool of politics, rather than a mode of politics'. Closer to home, STS-research also is critiqued for overly focusing on the Cold War's 'flashy flagships' such as nuclear weapons, space and computer technologies (1–2). The explicit refocusing lens in several chapters is Hecht's notion of 'technopolitics', which helps in providing new fascinating perspectives on Cold War colonial(ist) histories. A potentially perspective-changing essay is Ruth Oldenziel's reconceptualisation of the US as a 'networked empire' with its technopolitical-global hinterland of thousands of strategic islands such as the Azores, Diego Garcia, Guam and Kwajalein.

This archipelago anchors and moors US Cold War power by being intersecting technopolitical nodes in strategic, large technical systems of communication, surveillance and navigation. Another conceptually very valuable chapter is by Donna Mehos and Suzanne Moon on the circulation and delocalisation of technological expertise. Through concepts of 'place-based' and 'portable' knowledges – contrasted with indigenous 'local knowledge' – it provides two new tools with which to think about the different and differing forms of technological knowledges. Part of this is a fascinating non-intuitive story of how a Dutch company in Indonesia during post-war decolonialisation reluctantly is transformed from place-based crop production to providing delocalised agricultural expertise.

Some chapters, such as Clapperton Chakanetsa Mawhunga's study on armed technopolitics of African nationalist movements and Sonja Schmid's on East bloc nuclear cooperation, decentralises and turns traditional Cold War politics on its head by showing how countries frequently seen as satellite subsidiaries and passive recipients often technopolitically 'engineered' and exploited the struggle between the superpowers for their own local agendas. Another theme could be described as 'technopolitical semantics', which plays a pertinent role in various chapters on nuclear technologies which – despite the introductory complaints about its previous 'flashy' dominance – are some of the most interesting. Hecht and Itty Abraham show in their articles how the impact of the atomic bomb reshaped political geography through making natural resources such as uranium and rare earth minerals into strategic political resources. However, the Cold War is, in places, more of a backdrop or stage prop than a key actor or director of the plot. This is true in the otherwise excellent essays by Toby Jones on Saudia Arabian water politics and Peter Redfield on Médecins Sans Frontières' humanitarian kit.

Entangled Geographies succeeds very well in providing examples of how to decentre the Cold War geographically from the perspectives of countries and regions subordinate and satellite to the superpowers, but also to do so technologically by going beyond somewhat traditional Cold-War technologies to other new less flashy but equally political ones.

Mats Fridlund, Helsinki, Finland

Joseph J. Corn. *User Unfriendly: Consumer Struggles with Personal Technologies, from Clocks and Sewing Machines to Cars and Computers*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011. Pp. 272. \$55.

'It is hard to imagine life without machines' (p. 1) – this is the statement with which Joseph Corn begins *User Unfriendly*, and one he further delineates by