

Waves and Forms: Electronic Music Devices and Computer Encodings in China (MIT Press, Inside Technology)

Discussion published by Basile Zimmermann on Tuesday, January 26, 2016

Dear Colleagues,

I am happy to announce that my book has recently been published by MIT Press:

Waves and Forms: Electronic Music Devices and Computer Encodings in China (Inside Technology)

By Basile Zimmermann

Overview

Technical objects constrain what users do with them. They are not neutral entities but embody information, choices, values, assumptions, or even mistakes embedded by designers. What happens when a technology is designed in one culture and used in another? What happens, for example, when a Chinese user is confronted by Roman-alphabet-embedded interfaces? In this book, Basile Zimmermann examines the relationship between technical objects and culture in contemporary China, drawing on concepts from science and technology studies (STS). He presents a new theoretical framework for “culture” based on the notions of waves and forms, which provides a powerful descriptive toolkit for technology and culture.

The materials Zimmermann uses to develop and illustrate his theoretical arguments come from three groups of case studies about the use of technical devices in today’s China. The first and most extensive group consists of observations of electronic music devices in Beijing; the second is a study of a Chinese networking site, “Happy Network”; and the third is a collection of personal, small-scale observations on the way Chinese characters behave when located in alphabet-encoded devices such as mobile phones, web pages, or printed documents. Zimmermann discusses well-known frameworks from STS and combines them with propositions and topics from Chinese studies. Each of the case studies advances his theoretical argument. Zimmermann’s account shows how cultural differences can be integrated into STS research, and how sinologists can turn their attention from ancient texts and traditional art to everyday things in present-day China.

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You can find a link to the book on the MIT Press website here:

<http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/waves-and-forms>

Kind regards,
Basile