

Amit S. Rai, *Jugaad Time: Ecologies of Everyday Hacking in India*. London: Duke University Press. 2019.

Reviewed by Yu-Wei Lin

In *Jugaad Time*, Rai investigates how Jugaad is performed in everyday neoliberal India.

‘Jugaad’ is ‘a Punjabi word that means workaround, hack, trick, or make do’ (p. x). It is a word ‘repeatedly featured in people’s self-presentation of their meshed media practices and work-related strategies in everyday life’ in India, and ‘is a reference to a sometimes elegant, but always makeshift way of getting around obstacles’ (p. 2).

Rai develops a pragmatist methodological framework, which moves away from a black-and-white binary definition of ‘hacking’, to contextualise how tools and actors are assembled to perform *Jugaad* in a variety of Indian media ecologies. In four chapters, he covered notable cases in point including the advertising campaigns from Airtel (India’s largest mobile phone network operator), consumer activism in North Indian villages, big data and smart cities development in Bangalore and Mumbai, business-process outsourcing (where labour and employment is becoming casualised and precarious), mobile phone practices in domestic settings, and the *Why Loiter?* Project.

Rai’s fieldwork shows that social practice of jugaad (workaround) is non-trivial ‘strategic deployment, production of time-spaces, and digital media assemblages [that] habituate heterogeneous populations in India toward innovation’ (p. 46). It contributes to the existing body of literature on hacking and hackers by showcasing the still underrepresented Indian context and its media practice to the ongoing mapping of diversity, heterogeneity, contingency and emergency in the hacker social worlds (Lin, 2004).

In addition to documenting how digital-human assemblages are configured and re-configured in-situ to ‘affect’, ‘become’, ‘compete’, ‘desire’, ‘differentiate’, ‘experiment’, ‘express’, ‘politicize’, ‘revolutionise’, ‘transform’ (in Deleuzian terms, see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), *Rai* extends the existing arguments to consider how Indian Jugaad is shaping and re-shaping one of the world’s largest economies, how politics of caste, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and environmental conditions are contextualised and embodied in mobile phone usage in neoliberal India.

For example, hacking practices have also been adopted in contemporary mobile phone business in India. But those found in makeshift ecologies and informal economy have different meanings and values. The labour involved in the latter context reflects postcolonial struggles against hierarchy, authority and deployed power. Their hacking and informalized workaround practices demonstrate a form of resistance of the oppression from capitalistic mobile phone industry who uses big data to monitor and control their users.

Another episode of hacktivism related to mobile media and communications can be found in the *Why Loiter?* movement in Mumbai (chapter 3). In this project, three feminists cleverly utilised mobile devices to create a dispersed collective that intervenes and transforms political, economic, social, gender, sexual, and kinship relations in India.

In *Jugaad Time*, Rai guides us to ask the important questions in digital media production and consumption: ‘what the force, sense, and value of the habituation of jugaad is, and what specifically would effect its actual and potential collective reorganization’ (p. xiii). And India matters because ‘India’s heterogeneous digital culture bodies forth subaltern diagrams of mobile hacking, neoliberal consumerism, digital control, media piracy, embodied perception, technological habituation, and new media assemblages.’ (p. xvi)

With new vocabularies and new concepts (e.g., Jugaad, frugal innovation, technoperceptual geographies, metabolic plasticity, affect-as-capacity, neo-materialism), *Jugaad Time* broadens hacker studies and advances media and cultural studies and digital humanities by providing an interdisciplinary view on the emergence of new media usage forms in one of the most competitive and fastest-growing mobile markets in the world.

References:

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Lin, Y.-W. (2004). Hacking practices and software development: a social worlds analysis of ICT innovation and the role of free/libre open source software. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. University of York, UK.

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