



The Undersea Network (Sign, Storage, Transmission)

By Nicole Starosielski

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In our "wireless" world it is easy to take the importance of the undersea cable systems for granted, but the stakes of their successful operation are huge, as they are responsible for carrying almost all transoceanic Internet traffic. In *The Undersea Network* Nicole Starosielski follows these cables from the ocean depths to their landing zones on the sandy beaches of the South Pacific, bringing them to the surface of media scholarship and making visible the materiality of the wired network. In doing so, she charts the cable network's cultural, historical, geographic and environmental dimensions. Starosielski argues that the environments the cables occupy are historical and political realms, where the network and the connections it enables are made possible by the deliberate negotiation and manipulation of technology, culture, politics and geography. Accompanying the book is an interactive digital mapping project, where readers can trace cable routes, view photographs and archival materials, and read stories about the island cable hubs.

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The Undersea Network (Sign, Storage, Transmission) By Nicole Starosielski Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

"*The Undersea Network* is a thrilling work of cultural analysis. Part critical travel writing, part investigative ethnography, part history of technology, Nicole Starosielski's oceanic odyssey takes her readers to out-of-the-way sites like the Honotua cable station on Tahiti, the mega-networked beaches on Guam, and to AT&T's offices on Keawa'ula Beach in O'ahu. She reminds us that the undersea telecommunications infrastructure is haunted by histories of maritime colonial connection, Cold War submarine conflict, and the fluctuating fortunes of finance. This superb book will transmute our common sense about the media ecologies in which we live."

(Stefan Helmreich, author of *Alien Ocean: Anthropological Voyages in Microbial Seas*)

"Nicole Starosielski's *The Undersea Network* is as expansive as its subject, revealing the networks that make global communication possible as vital worlds unto themselves. In most stories of new media, infrastructure fades into the background. But Starosielski flips the script, making infrastructure the star, vividly describing the places, the people, the institutions, and the politics that constantly work to make global communication possible. In the process, *The Undersea Network* offers new insights into globalization and digitization. It also teaches us how to study large and largely invisible technical and cultural institutions. Coupled with its groundbreaking digital companion (www.surfaceing.in), *The Undersea Network* will transform our understanding of the networks that make modern media possible."

(Jonathan Sterne, author of *MP3: The Meaning of a Format and The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*)

"Starosielski offers a crucial intervention into theoretical conceptualizations of communications infrastructure. . . . This rich text also has profound implications for how citizens in an always-networked society and economy understand our lived realities. *The Undersea Network* makes us reconsider the 'wirelessness' of our world by admonishing us consider it in terms of its peculiar and ongoing connectedness to geographies, cultures, and politics."

(Sara Rodrigues *PopMatters*)

"[A] fascinating book that is part history, part travelogue and part socio-economic memoir. . . . Starosielski's account makes for fascinating reading, drawing together the varied threads of history, technical complexity, economic power and political will that have shaped the world's cable networks. Despite the scale of the infrastructure under discussion, the narrative remains intensely personal, and one to be enjoyed."

(John Gilbey *Times Higher Education*)

"*The Undersea Network* is a fascinating interdisciplinary look at the infrastructure that lets us communicate instantly across oceans.... [T]his book is a good read for anyone broadly interested in geography or communications."

(Eva Amsen *Hakai Magazine*)

"A fascinating cultural assessment of global undersea cable networks that carry most of the world's trans-ocean Internet traffic. ... Great stuff!"

(Christopher Sterling *Communications Booknotes Quarterly*)

"Overall, the book brilliantly brings together the global metanarrative of mass communication with the local, material, and relatively immobile specificities of this undersea network.... Starosielski is extremely successful in rewiring our wireless imaginaries of a networked world. The depth and breadth of the fieldwork conducted is noteworthy as is the production of the book itself, which contains a plethora of images, graphics, and maps."

(Rachael Squire *Transfers* 2016-04-01)

"The multistranded analysis developed in the book provides a rewarding account that blends cultural history with investigative ethnography and along the way takes us to remote sites in Hawaii, Tahiti and Guam. Most importantly, Starosielski brings the infrastructure of undersea cable systems back into visibility, showing us in vivid ways what makes global communications possible."

(*European Journal of Communication* 2016-04-01)

"*The Undersea Network* succeeds in introducing an environmental consciousness into one's imagination of digital networks and the ecological, political, financial, place-based contingencies that support, interfere with and maintain our global telecommunications system. It makes cables salient. ... *The Undersea Network* is required reading for students of media and network archaeology, communication educators, political and environmental scientists, the history of technology discipline, and readers within the cable industries and government."

(Emily Goodmann *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* 2015-06-01)

"If you have ever wondered why infrastructure has suddenly become a buzzword in cultural anthropology and science and technology studies, then follow the signal. That is precisely what *The Undersea Network* does, brilliantly redeeming the promise of multi-sited fieldwork methods to highlight the connections and disconnection—historical and present-day—among far-flung people and places.... For anyone with an interest in Pacific studies, this book has plenty to ponder."

(Robert J. Foster *Journal of Pacific History* 2016-02-08)

"[A]n enthralling read for anybody with an interest in telecoms infrastructure and the way that it is presented in the media."

(Mike Conradi *Telecommunications Policy* 2017-01-17)

About the Author

Nicole Starosielski is Assistant Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Joseph Griego:

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