

## **Part I**

### *Question 1: Laptops vs tablets*

Both of these journalists take a narrow view of the computing market landscape, and could benefit from broadening their perspectives. For example, taking an actor-network theory approach to the question of tablets and their adoption in relationship to laptop and desktop PCs would invite important questions they do not seem to have considered. If, as John Law argues, “society, organizations, agents, and machines are all effects generated in patterned networks of diverse (not simply human) materials” (p. 380) and “there is no reason to assume, a priori, that either objects or people in general determine the character of social change or stability” (p. 383), we might ask such things as: How might the power of people like Timothy Cook—who after all exerts no small amount of influence over key consumer issues like pricing and product availability—affect the networks that will ultimately determine the movement of tablets and other computers in the marketplace? What’s the role of apps and app developers in the adoption and use of tablets? What about traditional software products and developers? Where do mobile connectivity networks and providers fit in? The richness of these questions indicate that in this case an ANT lens can provide a much more complex take on the topic at hand, which can be recast not as simply a market(ing) question but an inquiry into what personal computers of various types can do and what humans want to do with them.

Use of Claude Fischer's user heuristic would also shed some valuable light: these journalists' lack of attention to how consumers actually use tablets and whether those uses are the same as for other computers leads them to position tablets and personal computers in opposition to each other. A more user-centered view of how and technology adoption works—i.e., following Fischer's lead and asking how and why people use tablets—might reveal that tablets and “traditional” personal computers are complementary or mutually supportive rather than simply competing products. Taking another tip from Fischer and his methods, evidence for this can be found in marketing materials: a selling point for many apps is that they allow you to seamlessly continue a single activity across multiple devices, a strong signal that instead of pushing other computers out, tablets are instead enlarging the personal computing ecosystem. (It's also worth noting that Fischer's chart illustrating the diffusion of selected household goods (reader p. 86) clearly shows that consumers who bought TVs continued to own radios, even though many commentators at the time thought radio would be driven out by TV.)

As an interesting side note, the LA Times quote provides a nice illustration of how Bijker's interpretive flexibility can play out over time even for the same group. In this quote's formulation (whether or not one agrees), consumers once found laptops new and exciting because they were clamshells that could open and close; now that touch-screens exist, those same properties make “laptops suddenly seem like stale, clunky gadgets”; laptops were once industry “darling[s]” and now they are a “casualty” in need of resuscitation.