

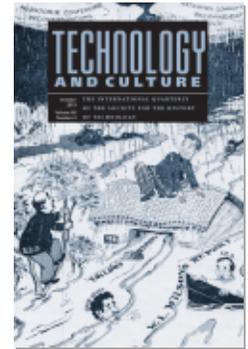


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Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic by Seb Franklin
(review)

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Technology and Culture, Volume 60, Number 4, October 2019, pp. 1128-1129
(Review)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tech.2019.0110>

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Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic.

By Seb Franklin. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015.

OCTOBER
2019
VOL. 60

Opening by invoking Daniel Bell's concept of the postindustrial society, Seb Franklin's *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic* examines how and why people in the late twentieth century believed they had entered a revolutionary era defined not just by the digital computer, but by an entire constellation of social and cultural transformations. To understand such periodization, Franklin analyzes the "cultural logic" that undergirds it and explores the harmful effects of applying that logic to people and society (p. xiv). This logic, he argues, is control, "the episteme grounding late capitalism" (p. xv) which enables both euphemistic phrases, such as "postindustrial society," and the capitalist exploitation that remains intrinsic to human life.

Relying on an interdisciplinary literature in conversation with Gilles Deleuze's description of "societies of control" that displaced Foucault's disciplinary societies, Franklin defines control in a cybernetic sense of self-regulation. "Control," Franklin argues, "should be understood as the logical basis of a worldview that imbricates literal practices of computation, the new organization and infrastructural concepts these practices facilitate, and metaphors derived from the electronic digital computer and its processes with a system of value production that can produce profit only by exploiting and dispossessing human life" (p. xviii). Franklin's contribution is a focus on how the digital computer became not just a technology but "a fundamental condition" applied metaphorically to both people and society. "To exist, from the point of view of control," he proposes, "is to be digital" (p. xix). Though such digitality "promises to render the world legible, recordable, and knowable," it also filters out important elements (p. xix). Under such an episteme, the person becomes just another programmable object, and everything becomes just another form of exploitable labor.

Franklin first examines how the computer became a "universal metaphor closely attuned to the logics of equivalence, expansion, and subsumption inherent to capitalism" (p. 83). Here, Franklin traces the genealogy of control to the nineteenth-century works of Joseph Marie Jacquard, Charles Babbage, and Herman Hollerith which, he claims, predated the efforts of cyberneticists to equate people to digital devices. Then, in a fascinating chapter centered on cybernetics and game theory, Franklin shows how concepts initially developed to describe machines and human-machine interactions became generalized and universalized as metaphors for people and society that ultimately buttressed neoliberal economy theories espoused by writers such as Friedrich Hayek.

Such historical grounding is useful, but it does raise questions about periodization. Much of nineteenth-century development—including, as

Edward Baptist's *The Half Has Never Been Told* suggests, slavery—relied on computational methodologies, placing workers in competition with each other and breaking the individual into separate parts—all identified by Franklin as central elements of control. In developing this history, Franklin suggests not simply a genealogy but that disciplinary and control societies coexist, sometimes in tension but often in in harmony. If that is the case, then where is the dividing line between the two? How do they relate to each other? Franklin begins to answer such questions, but more thorough development in the context of the nineteenth century would be fruitful.

In the remainder of the book, Franklin explores how control spread through a range of cultural elements, including the “black box” metaphor of cyberneticists, the literary works of Samuel Beckett, films such as *The Sixth Sense*, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Each, Franklin shows, transformed the computer from a “finite, concrete technology to a universal metaphor” (p. xxi) applicable to both society and people. These chapters provide excellent models for analyzing digitality even in unexpected areas, but further contextualization, especially on issues of gender, race, and sexuality, would have broadened the analysis. It would have been illuminating, for instance, to analyze why so many people from disempowered groups have seen the digital as a means of resistance. Do such views suggest another, potentially more liberating, logic beyond control? Franklin does not say, and the final analysis offers few specific solutions or possibilities for escape from the logic of control.

Often challenging but always insightful, Franklin's *Control* offers a valuable contribution to the growing literature on cybernetics and its connections to the power dynamics of a digital world.

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Generic: The Unbranding of Modern Medicine.

By Jeremy A. Greene. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. Pp. 354. Paperback \$29.95.

What is a prescription drug? It is, of course, a pill, injection, or infusion that we take to cure or treat disease. It also is a technology, created by humans and intertwined with innovation systems, regulatory policy, and marketing. Yet most histories of pharmaceuticals either have focused on medical aspects (quality, safety, and efficacy); political dimensions (debates over marketing, pricing, and insurance); or anthropological perspectives (human stories of discovery, testing, and use) of pharmaceuticals. Jeremy Greene's thoroughly researched and insightful analysis of generic drugs helpfully crosses boundaries between these types of histories while raising,