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**Digitality and the Development of Racial Capitalism**

This may be the book of this posthuman moment. *Digitally Disposed* revolves around materialist questions of discourse and the displacement of workers from levers of power in the cybernetic mainframe of the modern digital world. Applying significant socioeconomic questions of Marxism and more recent questions of racialized capitalism within postmodern readings of race, class, and gender, *Digitally Disposed* denies that digital spaces will, in the future, somehow become more objective and egalitarian than the economy of the last few centuries. The work asks, through a broad structural analysis, how labor becomes disposable. To answer, Seb Franklin looks directly at histories of potent discourses that applied positive readings of economic networks, which frequently hid racialized dialogues that consistently suppressed the proletariat and disposed of unneeded labor.

Thinking about diverse historical networks of telegraphic links and more modern internet cables, social networks between peoples in the lived world, and economic networks of modern finance, *Digitally Disposed* explores what it means to be connective in the digital age and upon the precipice of artificial general intelligence. Drawing on a wide array of theorists in media studies and cybernetic history such as Norbert Wiener, Friedrich Kittler, Michel Serres, and N. Katherine Hayles, and social analysts and historians of racialization including Walter Johnson, Frantz Fanon, and Sylvia Wynter, Franklin does not shy away from exposing the racialized and gendered dynamics that support the abuses of workers in modern digitized capitalism.

Focusing on networks of humans and objects, both in digital space and the lived world, *Digitally Disposed* thinks much about the cybernetics of Wiener as applied to modern digital spaces. Franklin’s work here, and in earlier iterations, explores the control exhibited by networks of incentives and the informatics of value determined by networked existences of the modern age. The transmission of information and the pacing upward of informatics into accelerationist ideals is essential for determining the value of any given exchange in the ever-changing digital world. The transmission of such information that determines modern value is constructed, in part, through a historical palimpsest of race and gender tied to labor value and the displacement of labor value.
from enslaved and domesticated women during the early modern era.

Historical relevancies of racialist thinking and gendered misogyny are explored by Franklin in diverse texts to show how the idea that networks are ever expanding in inherently positive manners must be reassessed. Rather, the moralistic idea that network expansion is good for humanity is questioned here through a reading of a wide range of literary and artistic sources to show that that very idea of networking as positive is part of an idealist thinking about networks arising out of the Atlantic slave trade and pro-capitalist discourse from that era of networked ships on bloodied ocean waters.

These central ideals of the Atlantic slave trade implicitly guide this work through bookending of the Google-named Equiano undersea cable, termed for the famous writer of the most prominent slave narrative of the late eighteenth century. In Franklin’s reading, the naming of the cable as such is a continuation of a discourse that uses liberalizing language of freedom and liberty to justify the greater connections between peoples in the networks of digital spaces. Rather, for Digitally Disposed, such liberalizing language is generally employed by corporate entities as a smokescreen to hide the dynamics of race, gender, and class that operate at the base of networking.

Mathematics is essential for Franklin’s reading, as with his interpretation of Charles Babbage on the long-term unreliability of laboring human bodies. More humanistic readings also feature in the book, as with modern media examples that are explored in numerous chapters. Franklin relies on social theorists as well, offering the readings of J. L. Moreno and Helen Jenningson on social networking in the early twentieth century related to labels of criminality for those who attempted to live outside of standardized economic networks. He also potently analyzes the work of historians, as in his reading of Reinhold Martin and analysis of the networked connections of Monticello that allowed for Thomas Jefferson’s abuse of Sally Hemings and the broader enslaved community. Incorporating insights from a range of disciplines, Digitally Disposed thus offers an eclectic analysis that is situated under a guiding principle of networks that are regularly supported by racialist discourse. These diverse readings, from advanced mathematics to critical readings of television, music, and film, do not cloud the central reading of the informatics of value that drive the work. Rather, as with any important reading of theory, they create more understanding for the reader.

With an important reading of the roots of digitality and cybernetic networks through histories of racism, Franklin reiterates the vitality of diachronic analyses of the emergence of modern digital spaces, as focusing on the deus ex machina of digital leaders’ and bourgeois programmers’ narratives denies a vast history of oppression, and still-hidden contemporary labor oppressions, that make the coming of artificial general intelligence possible and nearly inevitable. Pushing against the universalizing tendencies of digital discourse that manifest the idea that digital networks are a savior that has simply arrived like a Newtonian apple, Digitally Disposed illuminates the clear racialized dialectics that created the impetus for such networked patterning of social discourse and the allowance of disposable labor within modern economics of the Western precariat, the accelerating attention economy, and labor camps throughout the Global South.

The mediations that allowed modern capitalism to be at the edge of such a powerful weapon as artificial general intelligence included creating racialized underclasses that had their labor stolen at numerous instances throughout Western histories of imperialism and slavery. In this modern age, those racialized signifiers in labor discourse remain as actants within capitalist superstructures, instigating a labor economy whereby artificial general intelligence may displace human labor, because human labor may be stolen and human
beings may be considered disposable when their laboring for the system is not up to par with that of mechanical and artificial laborers. As Franklin shows, technological advancements of the modern world consistently hide the racial, gendered, and classist renderings of laboring systems that currently allow for the rise of a new type of general machine laboring, both physical and intellectual, in this troubled modern age.

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