

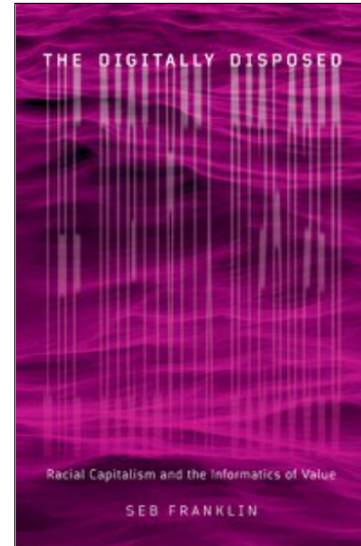
Seb Franklin, **The Digitally Disposed: Racial Capitalism and the Informatics of Value**, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021, 254 pp., \$27.00 (paperback).

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For author Seb Franklin in *The Digitally Disposed: Racial Capitalism and the Informatics of Value*, to be computed—that is, to be assessed, valued, organized, and schemed into and onto a system as structured by mechanistic politics and modes of categorizing and valuing matter and matter-as-bodies—is to be subject to abjection, de/legitimization, and the ordering of life and liveliness. Digitality as a concept, phenomena, and matrices of existence is normatively couched and bundled itself as networked to or networking the possibility of democratization within modern discourses of capital, connection, freedom, equality, egalitarianism, and emancipation.

A universal and universalizing means of democratic participation and practice, digitality is often equated as the ideal commons for dialectical exchange, as it embodies both democratic and neoliberal core beliefs (i.e., freedom, access, self-agency, and ultra-autonomy, to name a few). Exploring historicities of predigitality, particularly the theorizing stemming from the 1940s' American and European cybernetic and information system tradition, proves illuminating to the various erasures and omissions—the abjected and abjections. Such abjections have been necessary to create digitality itself, and for digitality to continue its reproduction of stratifying systems. In our contemporary, digitality orders and values life. Digitality's contemporary machineries are inherited from theoretical debates on the use, mapping, and imaginative theorizing of the rise of technology, culture, and the optimization of a Fordesque society. Examining literature from the European and American canon on early data systems, communication theory, and computational theory clarify digitality's predesign of automating exclusion, abjection, and bodily codification.

Franklin engages in a genealogical project of mapping the ways in which organizations and logics of racial-capitalist power found within digitality constitute the digital-liberal subject, the digitally unupgradable, differentiated valuing, and the human-as-object and human-object ordering. For Franklin, all—bodies, objects, and places—are networked onto digitality through differentiated relations to capital and capital's use; agentic-like subjects as digital users maintain connection to digitality through their individual participatory practice and only continue their liberal, agentic subjectivity through perpetual connectivity to digitality. The liberal subject remains simulated as liberated and global only if the liberal subject remains digitally connected and connected to digitality's various grids. As the abjected other, humans-as-objects or zootechnical animals are used to preserve the commodification process found in digitality's circulation. Things, objects, bodies, data, and matter are able to move because of the zootechnical animal. *The Digitally Disposed* uncovers linkages of capital's naturalized relationship with digitality, technology, and communication systems—and as an extension capital assembles to the democratic mythos of digitality. Power hides under the networks of global democratic digitality.



*The Digitally Disposed* follows the principal question of how differentiated exclusion and structured erasure become a precondition for digitality's rise and contemporary sustenance. Moreover, how do such immaterial operations of digitality come to constitute value and complex valuing systems through informatic nature? To respond to these inquiries, Franklin turns to mid-20th-century findings within the fields of cybernetics, information theory, computational science, and psychosociology to posit how bodies are sorted, marked, and created as modal points whose purpose is to facilitate the democratization of capital—and democratic-like conditions for the privileged center. Franklin insists that capital recognizes value—a degree of value and in a particular time period—as what can be computed and what can be read as useful. Digitality defines value as what can be put to use in any contingent data system, even if temporarily so, and with full acknowledgment of bodies and objects as continual degrading matter.

Franklin maps the liberal subject as the digital user, the holder of the consumer positionality, the subject that must consume to hold positionality, and the subject position with the presumed ability to choose, connect, and in some ways remain a contingent citizen. The digital liberal subject is erroneously understood as the self-possessing, upgradeable, and free subject, whereas the mechanical subject is the continually devalued, disposed, racialized, gendered, classed, and differentiated Other. The mechanical subject is that which is folded onto the apparatus and system, like that of a highly replaceable and simple coil. The unupgradable zootechnical animal is abstracted and reduced to labor, as an object for use, and as a modal point for and of circulation in digitality. It is this abstraction—the reduction of human life as circuits, points within a network, information and data, that mirrors computation. Thus, a particular body's expendability, use, and need within matrices or systems compute their valuation, worth, and gradation of significance. It is here, through the computation of bodies as needed, that the dispensability of human subjects is up for digitality to determine. This is also the location of the ascriptive process of racialization, gendering, and hierarchizing. Franklin's analysis moves beyond the links between information access and inequality and into the realm of power's constitutive abilities to carve technologies for continual dispossession. The democratic digital imaginary is determined by informatics of value.

Nodding to processes of otherization produced by digitality, Franklin gestures throughout *The Digitally Disposed* the disposed positionality as that of the abject/abjected—the feminized, racialized, classed, othered. Selectively addressing the racialization processes through digitality's computation, as the text's subtitle suggests, *The Digitally Disposed* signals the conjunction of capitalism, gender, sexuality, and ability. It is fair to state that Franklin signals intersectionality, perhaps offering spaces of intervention for future scholarship while at the same time productively centering European and American canons to map why digitality is a violent racializing project. To understand why digitality races subjects, the author turns to early European and American scholarship. The book offers answers as to why digitality's informatic nature functions as a racial capitalist enterprise—that is, the caste-like organizing of bodies as digital users and/or the digitally disposed. Primarily centering eurocentric traditions forecloses the possibility of critical theorizing beyond one interconnected relation of capital and race—and even then, at best, recenters race studies from the gaze of Eurocentricity's dominating scholarly thought. To be fair, the significance of Franklin's project lies in the intentional selectivity of eurocentric thought. Focusing on eurocentric thought allows for sense-making of the preconditioned terrain that digitality comes to occupy half a century later. However, inclusion of Third-World critique, intersectional environmental critique, non-European thought, queer critique, queer of color critique, women of color theory, decolonial and postcolonial theory—and any non-European in origin

scholarship—is incredibly sparse. While the marginal signaling of intersectional dispossession may be read as empty signification or token referential citations—which is valid—*The Digitally Disposed* maps a predigitality constitutive logic of abjection and dispossession and how it came to be. Franklin thoroughly makes the case for an abjected non- or semisubject that we can assume, given racial and gender history, is the racialized and gendered subject; that is, we are to assume that some bodies are made nonlegible and are therefore not White, patriarchal, elite subjects. The abjected, thus, is always already understood as the nondominant position holder. Once a body is marked with abjection, the inferential argument is that the abjected body moves through feminization, domestication, racialization, or some mechanism of othering through sorting. It is fair to say that the book describes the abject subject and that the abject subject moves through racialization. Racialization does not necessarily mean abjection, as is the case, for example, with hegemonic notions of Whiteness.

There are both advantages and disadvantages in starting with predominantly Eurocentric scholarship; such scholarship is representative, symptomatic, and an articulation of Whiteness and ahistorical theorizations of the cybernetic and information system early tradition. On the one hand, such centering (and recentering), I gather, is intentional on Franklin's part—as that is, indeed, the origin of digitality to begin with. On the other hand, in doing so, Eurocentric ways of understanding racialization and digitality continue to cement Eurocentricity as the only starting point for thought and critique. All of this is to say that if the study of racial capitalism and digitality engaged as a revisionist project, with the aim of centering transgressive digital spaces of non-Whiteness, would digitality still engage in racial dispossession? This would be a different project. It is worth, however, considering sites of digital racial undercommons, third digital spaces, connections and circuits fused from rebellion and abolition, and digital undercommons of hackers, jammers, pirates, remixers, activists, and pranksters. There is, I imagine, a digitality that exists beyond the grip of Eurocentrism and capitalism's computation. Is there no space of and for digital sovereignty? Is it possible to engage in the hijacking of digital circuits for the creation of undercommon activity? This would be, undoubtedly, a different book but one, I suspect, that comes after the foundational work present here. In chronicling predigitality, Franklin exposes the material consequences of global suffering, all shielded under digitality's democratic pretext.