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Jeremy Packer, Paula Nuñez de Villavicencio, Alexander Monea, Kathleen Oswald, Kate Maddalena, and Joshua Reeves, **The Prison House of the Circuit: Politics of Control from Analog to Digital,** Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023, 311 pp., $30.00 (paperback).

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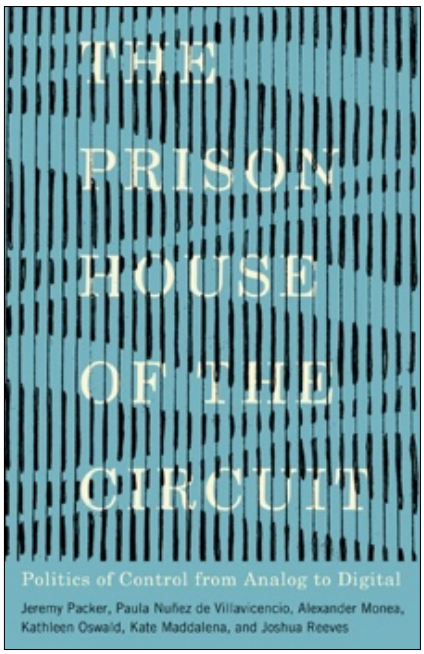

Discourses on methodology in the field of communication and media studies generate complex modes of philosophical and scientific inquiry. ***The Prison House of the Circuit***: ***Politics of Control from Analog to Digital,*** by Jeremy Packer, Paula Nuñez de Villavicencio, Alexander Monea, Kathleen Oswald, Kate Maddalena, and Joshua Reeves, continues along this tradition. Much of the book is considered in conversation with Michel Foucault and Friedrich Kittler. The authors consider the capabilities of the circuit through how temporality and spatiality attempt to affix bodies onto this mode of movement. In doing so, the authors historicize how different versions of the circuit emerge from histories of disciplinary practices. Using an approach of media genealogy rooted in media archeology, the authors develop a theory of circuits that "interpenetrate human bodies [and] how they shape human experience in the name of solving problems" (p. 6). The theory of the circuit is not a criticism of network theory. Rather, it is an indication of the *network* as a near pervasive and yet rarely defined term in many scholarly fields. The circuit as a framework of analysis helps us examine how power is constituted through boundary-making and through understanding how to "modulate/attenuate" (p. 18) the human in this circuit.

The authors introduce this through the execution of William Kemmler, who died through an electric circuit in what was called at the time a "humane execution" (p. 2). This is a recalling of the introduction to Foucault's (1975) *Discipline and Punish*, in which the graphic public execution of domestic servant and attempted kingslayer Robert-François Damiens foregrounds the concept of disciplinary power. The circuit, or, a management of flows, is "simultaneously physical, conceptual, and logical" (p. 8). The use of circuitry as metaphor points to the means through which power is disseminated. In this sense, power in a circuit is performed through its implementation and governance and ascribed to the set of circumstances in which practices of these objects are informed by their context.

The objects analyzed in each chapter at first glance do not appear to be connected, yet we can see the possibilities of the object through their performance vis-à-vis contextual historicization and speculative futures. Simply put, these objects are analyzed through the lens of a circuit and split into chapters that include mediated and militarized bodies, through the Signal Corps in the American Civil War followed by identification cards used as the governance of bodies in the First World War. Other chapters consider

histories of police automation, technologies of the automobile, and tools developed to enable vision in facilitating Western concepts of modernity.

The authors first analyze the development of aerial telegraphy utilizing flags in the American Civil War. The analysis of this system points to the first chief signal officer, Albert Meyer, who sought to develop this system through the incorporation of the body into a semiotic system that eliminates vocal exchanges of communication and implements visual and sonic communication in forming a pseudo "wireless" circuit; what the authors call a "military science of the sign" (p. 55). The authors state the importance of closing off the system to avoid being picked up by enemy intelligence, which can be problematized. This closed-off circuit of communication does not separate the body from the subject. One of the highlights of this chapter is the questions posed as a result of the historiography of the Signal Corps regarding time, space, and speed.

The militarized war machine logic required within the implementation of the Signal Corps is not the only way circuitry works itself through maximum efficiency in a time of war. The circuit as triage for attending to wounded soldiers in the First World War is both directly implicated in the maintenance and governance of bodies but also for the health of the nation and its war effort. Triage, in this context, involved punch cards and Hollerith tabulating machines to ensure efficiency as well as militarized eugenic science, which used data management to develop a political economy of health. The authors' reading of triage in this context, then, while seeing the humanity in developing triage as a technology, also interpret triage as a biopolitical strategy for population management in the warzone. The authors further triangulate the reading of triage-as-technology as a prehistory of the computing effort of the Second World War. This argument is positioned as a way to help the reader see how the governance of bodies in this context is central to the way power is ascribed to a set of circumstances and the relations existing within that moment.

In the next chapter, the authors point to the primary functions in the analysis of police: first, how police and military technologies have often been viewed in tandem, and second, how historically, police surveillance often relies on the consistent precision of systems reliant on data management. They envision police media and its logistics through their application of circuit logic rather than a development of a network of databases. Scholars in the past have often studied this logic of network expansion through early models of biometrics, such as the Bertillon system. The authors distinguish two areas of literature—the examination of the police network and police representation in popular media. *Police media* in and of itself has been less studied and provides a unique distinguishing feature through the use of circuits. The authors treat technologies such as rumble strips (p. 137) as police agents, or as Marshall McLuhan (1964) would put it, extensions of man. These visions of cybernetic agents as police media see these agents as co-conspirators in a system of movement and measurement. While some police media come and go, the authors speculate that police power recoil into places of "extreme unintelligibility" (p. 142). Other readings of unintelligibility find liberation in this place, where liberation, or "getting ungovernable, might offer a way out" (Stanley, 2021, p. 114).

The next two case studies continue to point to the evidence of the circuit through the governance of flows. First, the automobile case study proposes that the car acts as a site in which televisual technologies work in conjunction with mobile components to reinvigorate the possibilities of the time-

space axis as mentioned by the authors in previous chapters. Using Raymond Williams' (1974) methodologies in *Television*, the authors examine the automobile using the historical context that further individualizes the governed bodies being circulated in Williams' centralization of the television in the home.

Vision, or the development of tools that facilitate *seeing*, further the examinations of the circuits between technology and sense, where vision is enacted as congruent to control of the body within the circuit—of particular note is the technologies developed to "correct" nearsightedness and therefore, make a body productive. The governance of the body in both of these senses seeks to ensure the body in this circuit cannot practice escaping the circuit.

The book looks at this idea of the governed body in the circuit and asks us how power is expedited by circuitry. The authors consider how power expands in the circuit while using speculation as an approach to consider the possibility of escape from the circuit. Similarly, Wendy Chun (2020) describes networks logic as "leaking [by] making users vulnerable" (para. 3). Problematizing networks and circuits as all-encompassing becomes part of a tradition of revisiting concepts long deemed too ambiguous for the analysis of new cases that seek to analyze formations of power at the intersection of technology. Sarah Sharma and Rianka Singh's (2022) edited book, *Re-Understanding Media: Feminist Extensions of Marshall McLuhan*[1] is also complimentary to this tradition.

Finally, the history of media genealogy and the benefits of this method for furthering scholarship in the field of communication are addressed, noting gaps in different approaches that can be complementary to one another. They point to the importance of the distinction between media archeology and media genealogy. While there are many similarities between the two methods, the authors argue that media archeology "intensifies the limitations already latent in German media studies by neglecting politics" (p. 214), while a media genealogy approach allows for a more interdisciplinarian reading, something that is beneficial to communication scholars.

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[1] A review of the book (Stephens, 2023) was recently published in the *International of Journal of Communication*.

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