



The Cultural Logic of Computation

By David Golumbia

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Advocates of computers make sweeping claims for their inherently transformative power: new and different from previous technologies, they are sure to resolve many of our existing social problems, and perhaps even to cause a positive political revolution.

In *The Cultural Logic of Computation*, David Golumbia, who worked as a software designer for more than ten years, confronts this orthodoxy, arguing instead that computers are cultural “all the way down”—that there is no part of the apparent technological transformation that is not shaped by historical and cultural processes, or that escapes existing cultural politics. From the perspective of transnational corporations and governments, computers benefit existing power much more fully than they provide means to distribute or contest it. Despite this, our thinking about computers has developed into a nearly invisible ideology Golumbia dubs “computationalism”—an ideology that informs our thinking not just about computers, but about economic and social trends as sweeping as globalization.

Driven by a programmer’s knowledge of computers as well as by a deep engagement with contemporary literary and cultural studies and poststructuralist theory, *The Cultural Logic of Computation* provides a needed corrective to the uncritical enthusiasm for computers common today in many parts of our culture.

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Editorial Review

Review

The Cultural Logic of Computation is a brilliant, audacious book. It might be described as a rollicking, East Coast version of Alan Liu's *The Laws of Cool*-- or one part *Laws of Cool*, one part *Seeing Like a State*, with more than a dash of Baudrillard and Virilio for brio. Golumbia's argument is that contemporary Western and Westernizing culture is deeply structured by forms of hierarchy and control that have their origins in the development and use of computers over the last 50 years. I look forward to pressing this book on friends and colleagues, starting with anyone who has ever recommended *The World is Flat* to me. (Lisa Gitelman, author of *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*)

The Cultural Logic of Computation is a fascinating and wise book. It takes us with great care through the history of the computational imagination and logic, from Hobbes and Leibniz to blogging and corporate practice. Its range includes the philosophy of computation, the ideology of the digital revolution, the important areas of children's education and education in general and glimpses of brilliant literary insight. Required reading for the responsible citizen. (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak)

Golumbia is no Luddite; he readily admits that computers have brought a wide range of benefits to society. His chief purpose, though, is to demonstrate that these benefits come at the cost of accepting the technophilic ideology, and changing how we perceive our own essence as human beings. (Rob Horning *popmatters.com* 2009-07-24)

A work to be read as rawly new in the brute force with which it confronts the disavowed fatal flaw in a contemporary academic disciplinary formation: here, the intractably cultural First Worldism of digital media studies...[A] meticulously crafted polemic. (Brian Lennon *Electronic Book Review* 2009-07-31)

This is a thought-provoking book, full of interesting ideas that would be valuable to teachers and researchers in the area of contemporary culture...The work should also appeal to general readers who are interested in computerization's effects on culture. (R. Bharath *Choice* 2010-01-01)

About the Author

David Golumbia is Assistant Professor of English, Media Studies, and Linguistics at the University of Virginia.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ronnie Hamilton:

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Victor Shepard:

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