



Human Programming: Brainwashing, Automaton, and American Unfreedom

Scott Selisker

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Do our ways of talking about contemporary terrorism have a history in the science, technology, and culture of the Cold War? *Human Programming* explores this history in a groundbreaking work that draws connections across decades and throughout American culture, high and low. Scott Selisker argues that literary, cinematic, and scientific representations of the programmed mind have long shaped conversations in U.S. political culture about freedom and unfreedom, and about democracy and its enemies.

Selisker demonstrates how American conceptions of freedom and of humanity have changed in tandem with developments in science and technology, including media technology, cybernetics, behaviorist psychology, and sociology. Since World War II, propagandists, scientists, and creative artists have adapted visions of human programmability as they sought to imagine the psychological manipulation and institutional controls that could produce the inscrutable subjects of totalitarian states, cults, and terrorist cells. At the same time, writers across the political spectrum reimagined ideals of American freedom, democracy, and diversity by way of contrast with these posthuman specters of mental unfreedom. Images of such “human automatons” circulated in popular films, trials, travelogues, and the news media, giving form to the nebulous enemies of the postwar and contemporary United States: totalitarianism, communism, total institutions, cult extremism, and fundamentalist terrorism.

Ranging from discussions of *The Manchurian Candidate* and cyberpunk science fiction to the cases of Patty Hearst and the “American Taliban” John Walker Lindh, *Human Programming* opens new ways of understanding the intertwined roles of literature, film, science, and technology in American culture.

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