

■ “A New and More Elegant Edition”: Franklin’s *Autobiography* Mediated through Cultural Techniques

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Abstract

In his *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin compares himself to a book. More than once, he uses “errata” to describe the faults he has made in his life and prays for corrections of these errata in the “second Edition.” The comparison of his life to a book, I argue, indicates his eccentric idea of a life that is perpetuated through the cultural techniques of the eighteenth century. This shows that the idea of “de-faulting,” or removing faults, is embedded in his thoughts. Considering this, his request for the removal of his “errata” in future editions gains a posthuman implication. In this study, I employ “cultural techniques” proposed by German media theorist Bernhard Siegert to examine the use of the postal system and the memorandum book in Franklin’s *Autobiography*. Formed as a letter addressed to his first son, the first part of the *Autobiography* shows how the modern subject was constituted in a postal/police system that gave birth to the idea of liberty but also demanded self-discipline at the same time. In the second half of the essay, I examine Franklin’s use of the memorandum book in his “Art of Virtue.” The table on which his errata are enlisted and checked from time to time paves a route for the development of the feedback loop. Both techniques bespeak Franklin’s network thinking, anticipating modern cybernetics.

Keywords: Benjamin Franklin, cultural techniques, postal system, memorandum book, Bernhard Siegert, digital humanity

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The Body of B. Franklin, Printer;
Like the Cover of an old Book,
Its Contents torn out,
And Stript of Its Lettering and Gilding,
Lies here, Food for Worms.
But the Work shall not be lost:
For it will, as he believ’d,
appear once more,
In a new and more elegant Edition,
Corrected and Improved
By the Author.

—Benjamin Franklin, Epitaph

I. Introduction

In the mid-twentieth century, Norbert Wiener, comparing the living organism to the automatic machine, developed a theory to cover the entire field of control and communication. Deriving from the Greek word, *kybernētēs*, cybernetics means “steersman” or “governor.” In response to World War II, Wiener and his fellow researchers, such as Arturo Rosenblueth and Julian H. Bigelow, maintained that the central nervous system is not a self-contained system but a circulating loop traveling from the nerve to the muscle and constantly feeding information to control the movement of the body (“Cybernetics” 14). Taking examples from a machine stabilizing house temperatures and a steam engine regulating velocity, Wiener suggested that all purposive behavior depends on the nervous system sending negative feedback to modify the movement of the body (*Cybernetics* 114-15). In other words, for a body to perform a desired movement, it is not enough for the brain to give an order; the nervous system must also send back signals to report that “faults” have taken place. Moreover, Wiener also analogized the machine to “a bank of relays,” which responds to the “on” and “off” signals to perform the movement (*Cybernetics* 141). Wiener’s idea of cybernetics could help us trace the sources of today’s digital cultures to early American history, especially Benjamin Franklin’s legacy.

In this paper, I investigate the publication and circulation of Franklin’s *Autobiography* through German media theorist Bernhard Siegert’s theory of cultural techniques, with the hope that a larger picture of the digital humanities can be drawn. I venture to argue that Franklin’s advancement of the project of

moral perfection indicates that he may have been a posthumanist. I will thus contextualize his life and works in the eighteenth-century discourse network, consisting of various jobbing printing,¹ written letters, and the postal service.

II. Franklin's Life as a Book

In his self-drafted epitaph, Benjamin Franklin compares himself to a book. While his body is the perishable cover and worm-eaten pages, his *self* is the work, whose errata are always subject to corrections to be published in new and better editions. Franklin's life as a printer as well as newspaper publisher included all the printing technology in eighteenth-century colonial America. In his *Autobiography*, not only are technical details about printing clearly expounded, but printing terminology also serves as a metaphor for his life journey. More than once, for example, he uses "errata" to describe the faults he has made in his life—such as lost friendships, an unethical liaison, or a sibling relationship turned sour—and suggests corrections for editions in the future. In relation to the metaphor of errata is his comparison of life to a book: "[W]ere it offer'd to my Choice, I should have no Objection to a Repetition of the same Life from its Beginning, only asking the Advantage Authors have in a *second Edition* to correct some Faults of the first" (*Autobiography* 1; emphasis added). That is, Franklin looks forward to new editions with more mistakes removed. I thus argue that implicit in this statement is Franklin's special interpretation of human life, which suggests an artificial life perpetuated through technical means, regardless of the life whose existence has been reinforced by church doctrine.

In fact, Franklin is not the first and only one to suggest the analogy between a book and human life. According to Roger Chartier, countless texts "describe the human body as a book" in the seventeenth century (31). People believed that God created humans "in the same way as books are printed" (31). Even though this analogy may remind us of mind/body dualism predominant in Christianity, Chartier points out that the "soul" is conceptualized not as the disembodied thoughts of the creator but as the embodiment of cooperative handwork. In Chartier's words, "If the body of the book is the result of the pressmen's labor, its soul is not fashioned solely by the author but shaped by all who have a hand in its punctuation, spelling, and layout, including the master

¹ James Raven uses "jobbing printing" to mean those nonbook printed materials provided by contract printers in eighteenth-century England. Considering that my study deals with printing-related practices in the age of the Enlightenment, instead of nineteenth-century America, I will hereafter follow Raven's use of the word instead of Gitelman's in the following paragraphs.

printer, the compositors, the copyeditors and the proofreaders” (31-32). In other words, what constitutes the soul of the book is how the book is conceived, edited, corrected, and typeset before printing. Chartier’s argument runs parallel to what I maintain in this essay, but I will go further to investigate how the idea of “errata” in the discourse networks of the eighteenth century anticipates the feedback loop in new network technology.

However, before that, I would like to delineate the idea of the book in terms of the long eighteenth century. In the introductory essay to *This Is Enlightenment*, a collection of essays rethinking the Enlightenment in terms of media history, Clifford Siskin and William Warner maintain that “one cannot disentangle the phenomenon called Enlightenment from the history of mediation as it unfolds in the particular forms and genres, the associational practices, and the protocols first developed in the long eighteenth century” (22). The technology of printing, hence, brings about new genres, practices, and protocols. The new genres, as Siskin and Warner specify, are newsletters and magazines; new practices, voluntary associations and societies; and new protocols and practices, the postal system and public spaces such as the coffee house.² The “new” practices and genres challenge today’s definition of the book *per se*, as recent studies show a wide-ranging spectrum between handwriting, nonbook print, and the book. James Raven, for instance, in *Publishing Business in Eighteenth-Century England*, maintains that the long eighteenth century witnessed the evolution of “jobbing printing” at the beginning of modern capitalist society. The 120 years between the enactment of the licensing laws in 1695 and the first success of the mechanized printing of newspapers in 1814 are the golden age of the manual press. Raven contends that it is an often-overlooked fact that printers in the early modern era printed small items other than books, including “a vast array of printed materials . . . rang[ing] from simple documents, certificates and ‘blank’ forms, to sophisticated manuals and commentaries” (ch. 1). These printed materials often served certain purposes, such as bookkeeping, advertising, or news reporting. They often contained only temporary information. Even those that were used more in private settings, such as a diary or a memorandum book, were, in

² Essays collected in Siskin and Warner’s anthology also help shape media studies of the Enlightenment. John Guillory’s “Enlightening Mediation” discusses how the meanings of “medium,” “means,” “mediation,” and “media” change over the development of the printing technology, and how the conception of mediation “comes to be understood as a process arising from the proliferation of media” (39). In “Where Were the Media Before the Media?” Knut Ove Eliassen and Yngve Sandhei Jacobsen suggest that the difference in the meaning of medium/media before and after the nineteenth century is important in our understanding of the worlds. They carefully redefine their media archaeology to be “media ecology,” aiming to deal with “how the technologies of information produce a particular life world,” and how they provide “the forms of experience that make up, give shape to, and regulate the interiority of the socially constituted individual” (68).

most cases, regarded as tools of memory-keeping or note-taking, ready to be disposed of after the purpose was served. Furthermore, in *Paper Knowledge*, Lisa Gitelman contests the idea of “printedness” through the nonbook prints by “job printers,” such as diaries, pocket ledgers, portfolios, or memoranda (21).³ Accordingly, Gitelman suggests that these blank books “may have worked to structure knowledge and instantiate culture in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century” (24). The blanks of the jobbing printing, I argue, serve to compartmentalize and digitalize analogous symbolic flow; moreover, their “fillability” also suggests the presence of both a “moral economy” and a “cash economy” (23), a topic I will discuss in the fourth section of this essay.

An overview of Franklin's life will reveal how deeply he was intertwined with eighteenth-century media ecology. Beginning his career as an apprentice in his brother's printing house, he taught himself how to read and write through odd issues of British magazines. After intense quarrels with his brother, he embarked on a journey to establish himself independently. The three-year sojourn in London familiarized him with the most advanced printing technology at that time. Shortly after his return to Philadelphia, he founded the Junto, a gentlemen's society for achieving intellectual and moral advancement, published the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, and established a stationery shop (*Autobiography* 1-58). Already a respected public figure in his early thirties, he was assigned to be Philadelphia Postmaster, as his predecessor Andrew Bradford dissatisfied the Crown. Thenceforth, he profited from the “post” (*Autobiography* 85). He improved inland travel from Falmouth, Maine to Charleston, South Carolina, and sped up round-trip service among Boston, Philadelphia and New York (Gallagher 6-9). Taking advantage of the free postage granted to items distributed by the postmaster, he heightened the circulation and promotion of his newspaper. Additionally, he often corresponded with intellectuals in Europe about his research and inventions by franking his letters, signed “Free B. Franklin” (Gallagher 24). He started to write his autobiography at age sixty-five in a letter addressed to his first son, and he was persuaded by his friend to continue his writing project to enlighten the young generation when he was seventy-eight. Overall, as the spread of printing technology brought about a change in media ecology, Franklin, living through the long eighteenth century, can be viewed as the embodiment of this new age.⁴ In what follows, I would like to contextualize

³ See also Stallybrass, “Printing and the Manuscript Revolution” (112-17).

⁴ Although the Enlightenment is regarded as an intellectual and philosophical movement taking place mainly in Continental Europe, William Warner in “Transmitting Liberty” investigates how the eighteenth-century media intervened in the transmission of the concept of liberty in the New World. He regards the Boston committee of correspondence as an “actor network,” which utilized printing technology and the postal exchange to disseminate items promoting the revolutionary cause (102-18).

Franklin's *Autobiography* in the age of the Enlightenment, when printing technology was an important agent intervening in the production of literature and the practice of everyday life.

Here, I suggest that to examine the metaphor of Franklin's life as a book, one also has to take into consideration his post as postmaster, his jobbing printing, and his habit of letter writing. According to J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall, the editors of the authoritative version of the autobiography, the manuscript of this *Autobiography* was inscribed on "large folio-sized pages" folded "lengthways in half" and filled only on one half of the pages. Over four-fifths of the manuscript contains revisions on the halves which had been deliberately left blank (xiii). In other words, before the words were typeset, they had been written in a way that left them ready to be revised for publication. The original copy is now held by the Huntington Library.⁵ It is contained in a well-bound leather-covered notebook, paginated by the author himself, with an open address to William on the top of the first page. As a modern reader, I cannot help but wonder, in which form did Franklin expect the "letter" to be read by William? A manuscript written on folio-sized pages? Or a well-edited printed book? Or something in between?

In what follows, I will adopt the theory of "cultural techniques" proposed by Siegert and apply it to Franklin's *Autobiography*, featuring two techniques that Franklin took advantage of: the postal system and the memorandum book. In the Introduction to *Grids, Filters, Doors, or Other Articulations of the Real*, Siegert notes that since the late 1990s, German media theory has undergone a shift from media studies to studies of cultural techniques. According to Siegert, German scholars have a tradition of addressing the "exteriority/materiality of the signifier" (3), which leads to the rejection of media as an "ontological object" (5). What concerns contemporary German media theorists is not the history of certain media but how they serve as "a reference system for the analysis of bureaucratic or scientific data processing" (5). Moreover, they focus more on how elementary techniques, such as reading, writing, arithmetic, or time measurement, frame our knowledge and moral system. Siegert specifies three theoretical sources that German theorists of cultural techniques deploy: "Foucauldian discourse analysis, the mechanic thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, [and] the posthumanist Lacanian logic of the signifier. . ." (6). In Section III, I will investigate the use of the "post" in Franklin's *Autobiography* by appropriating Siegert's

Although Warner does not directly address Benjamin Franklin, Franklin is known to have been on the committee ("Committee of Correspondence to Benjamin Franklin").

⁵ The online archive of the Huntington Library shows that the manuscript is written in a notebook. However, further clarification is needed to decide whether the notebook was compiled from loose papers or the manuscript was originally written in that notebook. This unresolved question, in a way, indicates that the distinction between private letters and public books is gradated rather than clear-cut.

discussion of the early postal system in *Relays*. In Section IV, borrowing his idea of "Door Logic," I will continue to examine Franklin's use of the memorandum book mentioned in the *Autobiography*. The two cultural techniques, I argue, illustrate how Franklin's thought anticipated cybernetic technology.

III. Letters, Intercepted

In *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*, Siegert describes the technical conditions for the production of literature in the Romantic age, especially the characteristics of "relay": mediation through switching among different networks. According to Siegert, the nineteenth century witnessed the transformation of the meaning of letter writing. In ancient times, the postal system served only to deliver the orders of emperors, and the media carrying the messages varied from clay tablets to papyrus or parchment. Western Europe's adoption of the system did not change from its original usage until the early seventeenth century when Cardinal Duke Albrecht VII granted permission to charge postage for private letters and thus began "the general communication of 'people'" (Siegert 6-8). As the imperial postal system had paved the route, it became the communication network for the common people. Monitored by the regnant power, the postal service ensured the transmission of messages among commoners on the condition that the contents of letters can always be disclosed and that the procedure can always be interrupted. Siegert thus observes that the establishment of the modern postal system produces "subjects" in both senses: one that is registered in the coordinate system of the state and the other that gains permission to "speak" through the system (8-9).

Although the postal system seemed to grant certain degrees of freedom of speech to the common people, Siegert also sees it as unalienable from the police system. Considering that it was still the state that held the power to give permission for "bodies and symbols" to make exchanges (53), the implication of the utilization of postage is twofold: it enables the individual to become "the definitive ground for the exchange of information/people/goods" on one hand and turns the exchange into "a matter for the bio-politics of population" on the other (53). From Siegert's point of view, it should not be regarded as the undermining of state power but as the implementation of a more refined control system (54). In addition, the state had the financial need to keep mail circulation going, so the dependence on letter production was significant. Together, the police system and postal system worked hand in hand to establish the prototype of a modern communication network.

Based on Michel Foucault's power theory, Siegert's *Relays* gives a somewhat

pessimistic outlook on the modern age by implying that the modern concepts of the individual, democracy, and freedom were bred from the police institution that monopolized the postal system. Nevertheless, Siegert's studies of the postal system indicate that eighteenth-century media technology had already framed the prototype for networking media. Unlike oral communication, the post delivered messages through ongoing relays. More importantly, the network of the delivery system insinuates the openness of secrecy, and vice versa. Paradoxically, the messages that are supposed to be private have to be published in order to be delivered. On the other hand, batch delivery through relays not only makes the transmission possible but also creates a situation in which messages can be intercepted or missed. In other words, the postal system became the prototype of modern telecommunication in which information is delivered in data packets and switched in different gateways. However, as interception conditions existed in the process of transmission, the postal system also allowed more faults to seep in: the theft of batches, the accident on the road, the belated arrival at the next postal station, and so on. Hence, the "default" of the assembly is "fault," and therefore, to *de-fault* has become a necessary disposition of the system.⁶ That is, because of the necessary relay in the process of transmission, the message is destined to be delivered en route to those other than the targeted addressee. In what follows, I will apply Siegert's *Relays* to the investigation of how the postal system as a cultural technique intervened in the publication of Franklin's memoir.

The modern concept of the privacy of personal letters has to be suspended to appreciate the implications of the publication of Franklin's *Autobiography*, which addressed his first son. According to Susan Garfinkel, Franklin first started writing his life's story in 1771 but did not resume the writing of Part Two until he was urged by his friend Abel James, who possessed the manuscript of Part One and an outline of the project in 1784. Despite its addressee being William, parts of the memoir were published soon after his death in 1790 in two Philadelphia magazines, and the book-length French translation was published in Paris one year after he died. We do not know whether William, who had been estranged from his father during the War of Independence, read this "letter" or not, although the book begins with "Dear Son." William Temple Franklin,

⁶ The argument here is indebted to Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time, Vol. I*. In this seminal study, Stiegler deploys the myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus to illustrate human dependence on technology. Because Epimetheus forgot to equip human beings with suitable power to survive, Prometheus had to steal fire for humans to save them from extinction. Stiegler thus argues that humans are the "[f]ruit of a double fault—an act of forgetting, then of theft" (188). Furthermore, since the fault of Epimetheus is destined to be corrected by Prometheus, "de-fault" has become the "default" of human technology. Following this line of thought, I will argue that because the condition for the arrival of the message is its being intercepted in the process of relays, the setting of the postal system as medium of communication is prone to "fault."

Benjamin's grandson and literary executor, owned the final version of the manuscript but exchanged it for an earlier incomplete version that had been sent to Louis-Guillaume Le Veillard in 1789. Before the acknowledged, complete version was published by John Bigelow in 1868, several versions of Dr. Franklin's memoir appeared in different languages.

Judging from the fact that Lemay and Zall insert two letters from Franklin's friends between Part One and Part Two, I think they may also believe that it had been Franklin's intention to write a familial history for William to keep before he was urged by his friends to publish the work. In these two letters, Abel James and Benjamin Vaughan encouraged the continuation and the final publication of the *Autobiography* (qtd. in Franklin, *Autobiography* 58-62) for the sake of moral education of the "American Youth" (qtd. in Franklin, *Autobiography* 58). A "memo" from Franklin himself is also added at the end of Part One to suggest that there are "several little family Anecdotes of no Importance to others" in the manuscript (Franklin, *Autobiography* 57). Here, I would like to argue that although the arrangement of the manuscript by Lemay and Zall may show how Franklin had changed his mind, the distinction of purposes may not be of importance if the media condition of the eighteenth century is taken into serious consideration.

One must keep in mind that the notion of privacy did not even exist in the long eighteenth century. According to Siegert, even though the invention of paper created the illusion of the "secret room" by making possible a folded and secluded space, no one could claim the discourse as his or her own if the message had to go through the postal delivery system (*Relays* 31). In his words, "discourses of every kind were stored at the site of an Other . . . there could not possibly be any question of private letters" (*Relays* 31). In fact, the idea of "privacy" did not exist until the enactment of the General Prussian Common Law, which began to regard the violation of a letter's confidentiality as an "invasion of privacy" (*Relays* 41-42). Before, it was just "*crime falsi*" (*Relays* 41).⁷ Hence, Siegert reminds us that the meanings of "private" and "public" were very different in the eighteenth century from what they are now. Letters directed to family members were usually regarded as a form of "testament" or open announcements (*Relays* 40). Franklin's letter to William, I believe, is one example of this category.

From the biographical facts mentioned above, we could deduce that despite its original form being a letter to a family member, the manuscript was circulated among Franklin's acquaintances or intercepted by people other than the targeted addressee. More importantly, what may intrigue the modern reader is that Franklin seemed to be unoffended that his letter to his son was revealed to James and

⁷ A collective noun for dishonest statements such as fraud, forgery, perjury, etc.

Vaughan, and that furthermore, neither James nor Vaughan made any apology. In both letters, James and Vaughan seemed to take it for granted that the letter was open for everyone to read and even tried to persuade the writer to publish it for an even wider readership. In addition, although Franklin agreed to his friends' suggestion and proceeded to finish the rest of the memoir, there were few of the aforementioned "family Anecdotes of no Importance to others" that were deleted from the manuscript of Part One.⁸ Additionally, when he determined to continue writing his memoir, Franklin, without revising the letter form in the beginning, seemed to make several copies and distributed them. As Garfinkel notes, according to the "foreword" of the manuscript owned by Le Veillard, the final copy was a gift from Franklin to Le Veillard when Franklin served as the ambassador to France, probably around the War of Independence. Although this copy was incomplete, William Temple Franklin exchanged it for the final and more complete version that had been bequeathed to him by his grandfather, thinking that a cleaner version was more suitable for printing. This anecdote shows not only that there was more than one copy of Franklin's memoir but also that the writer had already reproduced and distributed many copies of his life story among friends before his death. Apropos of the multiple copies of the manuscript, translations and retranslations in different languages had been produced in Europe even before the presumably "authorized" edition was published by William Temple Franklin in 1819. The *Autobiography's* intricate history of publication that Garfinkel delineates, I argue, shows that Franklin's letter was produced in the context of the postal system, which rendered it private and public simultaneously. It begins as a father recounting his own life story to his biological son but ends as an address from the Father of the Nation to American Youth about the path to success, financially or morally.

There are also letters that may never arrive at their destinations, as Siegert points out. The possibility of being intercepted, however, bespeaks the absence of the concept of authorship before modern times. The history of the *Autobiography's* publication implies that William, the direct addressee of the letter, might have received the letter in the format of a printed book had he been alive when it was published. Because neither the recipient nor the sender owns the writing, neither of them can decide in which form the message would arrive or how many people would have read it before the message reaches its destination. Whenever a message is delivered through the postal system, it is dispersed in a system where

⁸ The only existing manuscript owned by Le Veillard is now collected in the Huntington Library. Despite the fact that Part One had been heavily revised, the digital images of the online archive show that many of the incidents of Franklin's early life which may be deemed trivial and personal were not deleted as the memo might have suggested.

circulation is the rule. Another example from the *Autobiography* is Franklin's correspondences with European intellectuals about the matter of electricity. Introduced to electrical experiments by Archibald Spencer at approximately age forty, Franklin started to experiment on the Leyden Jar with a circle of friends. Discovering some interesting findings, Franklin wrote several letters to his friends in Europe to share the successes of his experiments. Some letters were snubbed, but some were highly regarded and were first printed as pamphlets and later expanded to a "quarto volume," which had five editions (Franklin, *Autobiography* 131).

Sending a letter in the eighteenth century was almost synonymous with publishing one. As soon as the message was delivered to the postal system, it could be intercepted by different hubs before final delivery. No one owned the writing, so no permission of reading, translation, or even publication needed to be acquired. The account of the publication of his electricity findings is another example. In *Autobiography*, he showed that his letters concerning the discoveries of electricity were circulated among European intellectuals who took an interest in this subject in print format. In addition, through publications, he also made exchanges with scholars whom he did not know personally. The earlier books were translated into French and published in Paris because Count de Buffon, a renowned philosopher, thought the discoveries were too important to be ignored. The French version, however, displeased Abbé Nollet, the author of *Theory of Electricity*, who published *Lettres sur l'électricité* to defend his own theories against "Franklin at Philadelphia" (Franklin, *Autobiography* 131-32). Although Franklin stated in the *Autobiography* that he had determined not to enter into a dispute with Nollet, his friend Le Roy had no such compunctions and published Franklin's books in Italian, German, and Latin translations. Apparently, Franklin did not give consent to the publications and translations of the letters himself.

The above examples testify that the notion of authorship that Franklin and his contemporaries had is very different from what we have today. According to Ann Blair and Peter Stallybrass, beginning from the fifteenth century, an "info lust" brought up various experimentations with "new methods of storing, retrieving and disseminating information" (139). Hence, the modern concept of authorship is not adequate for us to comprehend different kinds of printed matter, such as blank forms, pocket notebooks, and books consisting of copy-and-paste materials. Blair and Stallybrass maintain that people of the seventeenth century thought of writing as analogous to honey-making. Bees make honey by finding and gathering nectar from flowers; similarly, human beings compose their writing through reading and collecting from what they read. More importantly, because corporeal memories are doomed to fade, methods for storing and filing

information are a necessity. Thus, the methods of “collaborative composition” were not uncommon (Blair and Stallybrass 153-63). A large quantity of publications in premodern times were compilations; therefore, authors were compilers rather than creators. Since the concept of book production was more about collecting and filing, the idea of plagiarism did not yet exist. Blair and Stallybrass indicate that Franklin once defended his friend Hemphill against the accusation of plagiarism because he believed that “ideas were a common treasury to be shared by all” (Blair and Stallybrass 162). To claim ownership of writing was, for Franklin, liable to prevent the circulation of intellectual property, the hoarding of which only benefited the rich and the powerful (162).

Overall, in the age of the postal system, whenever writing was delivered, it had always already been intercepted before it reached its final destination. However, I would like to counter Siegert’s emphasis on biopolitics by pointing out that although the interception of the letter is the precondition for its arrival, the interception is not always under the control of state power.⁹ The early history of the American Post Office bespeaks the failures of state control. In *How the Post Office Created America*, Gallagher argues that Franklin utilized the postal system in colonial America to help unite the states as a whole through the circulation of newspapers (18-31). Because of the complicated network system, a glitch, intended or unintended, is likely to happen. Hence, an “underground postal system” was developed to serve the cause of the American War of Independence by couriers who were bribed to carry colonists’ letters separately (25). Letters with critical information were subject to being intercepted, read, or even published, as in the case of Thomas Hutchinson (24). Moreover, from the perspective of media, the disposition of the postal system was subject to any possible intervention, human or nonhuman: a smear caused by the weather, an unfortunate accident on the road, or a gust of wind blowing the letter away. The postal system harbored the possibility of faults by default. Fully aware of this, Franklin set up a “Dead Letter Office” in Philadelphia in 1753 to deal with undeliverable mail (Leonard 22), a fact indicating that the concept of correcting faults in the system was in Franklin’s mind when he rearranged the postal system in the American colonies. In the following section, I would like to discuss how the memorandum book as a cultural technique served as the default unit in the complicated discourse network of the eighteenth century and how this device foretold the future development of cybernetics.

⁹ In *Propaganda 1776*, Russ Castronovo also suggests that the spilling of state secrets through the postal system during the American Revolution testified to the revolutionary potential that liberal subjects may possess (29-55).

IV. Franklin's Memorandum Book

In the previous section, by investigating the publication of Franklin's *Autobiography*, I argue that the eighteenth-century postal system served as a discourse network that enabled the new American Self to form. The practice of letter writing is personal and political and hence public at the same time. Here, I continue to discuss how Franklin's letter to his son, which also addressed young people, recruited the youth of the American colonies to participate in the project of moral perfection through a special device: Franklin's memorandum book. I will argue that the table in Franklin's memorandum not only digitalized morality but also installed a self-censorship device throughout the network.

Franklin claimed that he carried a memorandum book with him everywhere as an instrument for his "Project of . . . moral Perfection" (Franklin, *Autobiography* 66). Although using a pocket-sized memorandum book was a common social custom of the eighteenth-century middle class, a topic I will soon discuss, Franklin made his own memorandum book rather than buying a commercial product (Franklin, *Autobiography* 70). In this little book made by his own hand, he designed on each page a table with thirteen rows entitled with the name of a virtue and seven columns entitled with the days of the week. Featuring one virtue for each week, he defined thirteen weeks as one "course" and repeated the course four times each year. He used this book to exercise the "Plan for Self-examination" (71) by making marks for errors he had made in the cell where the date and virtue intersect. The book was reused repeatedly by "scraping out the Marks on the Paper of old Faults to make room for new Ones in a new Course, [so it] became *full of Holes*" (71; emphasis added). Notably, the pages were perforated through recurring use. He later transcribed the tables in an ivory memorandum book with durable red ink, in which he made marks with a black lead pencil, which was erasable with a wet sponge (71). In what follows, by appropriating the door logic/post-door logic purposed by Siegert, I would like to argue Franklin's memorandum book is something singular in that it heralds the age of cybernetics.

Although the use of the memorandum book was a common practice for European gentry in the eighteenth century, the design of Franklin's memorandum books was ahead of his times. In what follows, I will show how the custom of carrying the pocket book corresponds with Siegert's notion of door logic and how Franklin's use of memorandum books anticipates the post-door logic. In "Door Logic, or, the Materiality of the Symbolic," Siegert defines door logic as a cultural technique for differentiation and stratification. Maintaining that the opening of the door signifies, by contrast, the closedness of the wall, Siegert argues, "the logic of a door that is closed while it is open is the logic of the symbolic.

The door and the gatekeeper implement the differential law of the signifier itself” (*Grids* 194). The door is nomological, meaning that those who enter the door are subject to regulation within the fold. It is important to note that the door logic does not refer to the actual door but the techniques that involve unfolding operations (*Grids* 195). Taking Robert Campin’s *Mérode Triptych* as an example, Siegert illustrates how the various foldable apparatuses in artwork—such as a chair, table, candle holder, books, etc.—initiate “a game of presence and absence” (*Grids* 198).

Following this line of thought, I argue that the practice of using pocket books among eighteenth-century middle and upper class accustomed users to contemporaneity and circumstantiality at that time. According to Stephen Colclough, portable pocket-sized memorandum books were actually hybrids of diaries, account books, and ledgers that contained useful and temporary information, such as a table for currency exchanges or a list of bankers and taverns. He also suggests that the functions of the small memorandum books resembled those of the modern-day mobile phone (165). Various in form, they were usually multipurpose and served as short-term memory storage and a record of social intercourse. His study focuses on how female users made use of pocket books. They usually included not only bookkeeping tables for the users to keep track of money received and paid but also lists and tables containing gendered information, such as illustrations for the latest fashions (160-65). He thus concludes, “the memorandum books helped produce the obedient subjects of modern capitalism. Conscious of diurnal time and aware of issues of privacy yet keen to extend social bonds, these individuals needed a portable text in which their daily economic needs and desires could be recorded” (171).

Moreover, the design of the memorandum book is not only gender-specific but also class-specific, illustrating the operation of door logic, partly because of its appearance as a foldable object and partly because the materials contained in the pages work as gates or fences guarding social norms. For example, *The Ladies Compleat Pocket-Book* issued by John Newbery in 1753 had a main body that consisted of an accounting section for the user to keep track of money received and paid, a column for daily entries in which to record appointments, and a blank column serving as a diary. In addition to these main parts, the book was supplemented by a table describing the ranks of the aristocracy, the rules of etiquette, the rules of table games, and a list of suggested courses for hosting a feast. In other words, when its targeted user, a woman, unfolded the pages of the pocket book, she encountered more “doors” to be opened in order to be admitted to the eighteenth-century upper class. These tables and rules, with or without a printed grid, were fences that keep the uncultivated and unruly at bay. In a highly structured society, the tables work as sieves through which the members

of only the finer class may pass. While society is “opened” for those who are not only qualified but also adaptable, it is closed to a large majority who do not belong.

Franklin's memorandum book went further to pave the way for cybernetic technology, which depends on a feedback loop to send signals back to the network system. Obviously, his memorandum book did not serve to hierarchize society as the European pocket book did but was meant to form an ideal society of young Americans with higher moral standards.¹⁰ In other words, the memorandum book targeted not social etiquette but the moral elevation of the common people. In *Benjamin Franklin's Printing Network: Disseminating Virtue in Early America*, Ralph Fransca discusses how Franklin provided printers of colonial America not only with the techniques of printing but also with those of good conduct to disseminate his Project of Moral Perfection throughout America and Europe from the 1720s to the 1790s. His efforts paid off in many ways, for the social status of printers was elevated from that of merely tradesmen to respectful and trustworthy leaders of public opinion (20-21). The Junto, a club for moral, political, and intellectual improvements, was formed in 1727 for this purpose. It was an assembly of industrious and intelligent people meeting weekly to discuss moral and philosophical issues (47). Although it is not clear as to whether the little book was used among the members, I would like to suggest that Franklin might have conceived it as a gateway for those who aspire to be virtuous to enter the society of moral perfection, where a series of training courses that were disseminated through the network awaited them.

Franklin believed that virtue was a good behavior furnished by daily practice. However, goodness is, after all, very abstract. He thus borrowed from various enumerations of moral virtues of his days and listed the thirteen most important ones according to his discretion. This operation of quantification may not be his own invention, as Louis I. Bredvold observes that the conviction of social perfection achieved through the “absolute precision of the physical sciences” (165) was formed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Bredvold delineates the trajectories of this thought through the lineages of Descartes to Hobbes and to Leibnitz (165-73). In brief, natural scientists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tended to assert that the utopian project of human society was attainable if mathematical calculation could be applied. Ethics, in

¹⁰ In this paper, I focus only on how the table in his memorandum book showcases his cybernetic thinking. Even so, I would point out that, by elevating manual workers to the status of modern citizens, Franklin's project of moral perfection was never innocent of political intention. The dissemination of Franklin's revolutionary ideas through the printing network has already been examined by many scholars. For example, Michael Warner in *The Letters of the Republic* argues that Franklin deliberately eliminated the details of his biological life in order to pose himself as a “citizen of print” and “republican man of letters” (77; emphasis added) to the public.

other words, was manageable regardless of the “disparity between social science and physical science” (180). The idea of enumerating human virtues in Franklin’s project, hence, is an inheritance from earlier generations.

However, I would also like to point out that Franklin’s memorandum book is not merely for philosophical contemplation but a device meant for use. In his correspondence with Lord Kames, Franklin maintains that young men must receive the training of the “Art of Virtue.” He compares this “Art” to the arts of painting, of navigation, and of architecture:

If a Man would become a Painter, Navigator, or Architect, it is not enough that he is *advised* to be one, that he is *convinc’d* by the Arguments of his Adviser . . . but he also must be taught the Principles of the art, be shewn all the Methods of Working, and how to acquire the *Habits* of using properly all the Instruments; and thus regularly and gradually he arrives, by Practice, at some Perfection in the Art. (*Autobiography* 224)

In other words, for Franklin, the project of moral perfection has always relied on a technique one has to acquire through frequent practice. It is hence reasonable to suggest that the memorandum book is the “Instrument” he mentioned for achieving the perfection of this art. Furthermore, as I have discussed in Section III, the eighteenth-century postal system illustrated the oscillation between public and private, and the little book he carried everywhere was not meant simply for his “personal” improvement. Although he did not actually publish the pocket book, the format of the table transcribed in the manuscript of his *Autobiography* is a clear testimony to the idea that it was designed to be installed throughout the network.

It is noteworthy that the first version of the book is full of holes because the “faults” have been marked and erased repeatedly in their cells. The thirteen-by-seven table resembles a memory card on which information is coded as on/off signals. As a distant echo of punched cards, the perforated pages of Franklin’s memorandum book anticipate the new era of cybernetics. Although the true origin is obscure, the invention of the punched card is usually attributed to Joseph Marie Jacquard as he endeavored to speed up the operation of the drawloom in the early nineteenth century (Essinger 7-17). Jacquard’s success lies in his application of the punched card to the loom control system, which inaugurated the automatization of the loom by feeding the loom with preprogrammed information. The loom thenceforth became a machine (Essinger 37). In *Jacquard’s Web*, James Essinger notes the significant contribution of Jacquard’s punched-card programming to Charles Babbage’s Calculating Engine, the prototype of the modern computer (47). What I am trying to point out here is that Franklin’s table of moral perfection does not work simply as door logic that relies on symbolic operation. The enumeration and tabulation of virtues digitalized the coding of abstract quality into manageable parts. Tangible behaviors and abstract goodness

thus form a circular loop. The table on which faults are marked or coded continues to feed negative signals to the machine for its self-correction purpose, a device that reminds us of the feedback loops in the cybernetic system. Moreover, although the second version of ivory pages was not as perforated as the first version, its perpetuality shows that the new memorandum book is not to be discarded and renewed, like an ordinary pocket book, but to be retained as programming. In brief, by quantifying virtuous acts and regulating negative feedback, the memorandum book serves as a self-rectification device installed in Franklin's project of moral perfection.

Franklin's proto-cybernetic memorandum book corresponds to, I argue, the "post-door logic" proposed by Siegert. In "Door Logic," Siegert laments that, along with the installation of modern revolving doors or automatic sliding doors, the post-door logic has replaced the door logic of premodern Europe. Because these new doors are usually erected without handles for the human hand to operate, "the nomological door enact[ing] a logic of symbolic order" is now losing its power to the "biopolitical device of managing humans in motion" (201). Even worse, the invention of the automatic sliding door has nullified human autonomy by installing an electronic sensor on the door without a handle. "Operations of opening and closing, once clearly within the domain of human agency, bid farewell to man" (203). From Siegert's point of view, "[m]odern doors have irretrievably forfeited their nomological for a cybernetic function. The basic distinction between the inside and outside has been replaced by the distinction between current/no current, on/off" (203). In brief, as the rather complicated symbolic representation has been replaced by the electronic signals of the machine, human agency becomes obsolete. However, I would like to counter Siegert's pessimism by arguing that this momentum of automation harbors the potential for democracy. The opening, or closing, of a door has never been an act of free will, as Siegert imagines it to be. As I have mentioned above, door logic is more about social stratification when only certain classes are admitted to the enclosure behind the door. It implies a central control enacted by the reigning monarch. In contrast, Franklin's project of moral perfection applied to those who were involved in the discourse network that consisted of jobbing printing and the postal system in the long eighteenth century. Although it is still arguable that some, such as illiterate women and enslaved black people, were excluded, the new system embraced a multitude who would become American citizens. The perforated table in his memorandum book, serving as a self-regulation device, feeds on/off signals back to the system for modern citizens to assert their agency. In all, what has been nullified is not human autonomy but social hierarchy.

Conclusion

The cultural techniques employed in Franklin's project of moral perfection look forward to cybernetic technology in which the network system is equipped with sensor stations that keep on feeding on/off signals back to the system to remove its faults to achieve desired performance. Serving as postmaster in colonial America, Franklin may have had a more acute awareness of how a network system functioned and of what could go wrong in the relay process than his contemporaries did. A successfully delivered message testifies not to a perfect system but to an imperfect system ever ready to be corrected. This, however, is not a disadvantage but a merit because, unlike the door logic that serves to discriminate, a network system invites the citizens of the modern nation to join in. Each serving as an actant in the network, the American young man can discipline himself through the training program prepared by Franklin.

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「更新更好的版本」： 文化技術中介的富蘭克林《自傳》

摘要

富蘭克林在其《自傳》當中將自己的一生比喻為一本書。他不止一次用「勘誤表」來描述曾犯過的錯，並祈禱這些錯誤能在「第二版」中校正過來。我認為以書籍來比喻生命說明了富蘭克林獨樹一幟的想法，除了突顯十八世紀透過文化技術來延展的生命觀之外，也暗示「去錯」的概念早已蘊含在其思想中。從這個角度思考，富蘭克林對未來「勘誤」的請求深具後人類意涵。在本文中我將透過德國媒介理論家席格爾所提出的文化技術概念來檢視富蘭克林《自傳》中對郵政系統和記事手帳的使用。《自傳》的第一部是以他寫給長子的家書所構成，我將以此說明現代主體是如何在郵／警政系統中所形構，此系統同時也衍生出自由以及自我規範的概念。在本論文的後段，我檢視富蘭克林如何透過記事手帳來演練「美德技藝」。他設計來登錄、並一再檢核錯誤的表格則為控制學中的反饋迴路預作安排。不論是郵政，亦或是記事手帳都說明了富蘭克林所具備的網絡式思考，遙遙呼應了現代控制學發展。

關鍵字：富蘭克林、文化技術、郵政系統、記事手帳、席格爾、數位人文