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Golan, Tal

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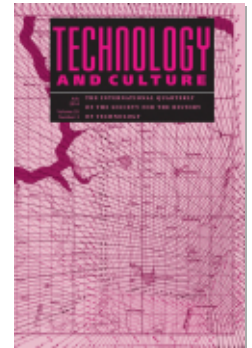


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The Truth Machine: A Social History of the Lie Detector by
Geoff Bunn (review)

Tal Golan

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cance. Adams ignores the central fact that de Forest's circuit generated no radio-frequency waves, and that Armstrong's did. And why fail to observe that those who actually understand the technology have always agreed overwhelmingly that de Forest's eventual victory over Armstrong constituted a legal blunder?

Non-technical errors also lurk within. Among the worst are Adams's unhelpful citations. One typical reference to his most important source contains only the following text: "a single piece of paper, dated Nov 28th 1900, Perham de Forest papers" (p. 435). The Perham Foundation provides a finding aid that indicates that the de Forest papers comprise a well-organized and large collection, and thus, by omitting box and folder numbers, Adams needlessly diminishes his study's value to other researchers. Also, by referring to engineers as "scientists," he reveals an ignorance of three or four decades of literature in the history of science and technology that places de Forest among technological practitioners. That is, although he sometimes used scientific knowledge to do his work, de Forest drew principally on a body of knowledge unique to technology.

Unfortunately, given the dearth of alternatives, those who wish to learn about the inventor of the audion and Phonofilm will find nothing better than this hastily written and deeply flawed book. Adams obviously knows a great deal about the cultural history of early-twentieth-century media, especially filmmaking, but his ignorance about technology and the history of technology spoils the promise of this study. By taking too many shortcuts, he has squandered an opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the history of engineering and invention.

GARY FROST

Gary Frost is the author of *Early FM Radio: Incremental Technology in Twentieth-Century America* (2010).

The Truth Machine: A Social History of the Lie Detector.

By Geoff Bunn. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.
Pp. 246. \$24.95.

Geoff Bunn's *Truth Machine* provides us with a novel social history of the lie detector. Earlier histories have documented the birth and development of the technology in the private spheres of the psychological laboratory and the police station. Bunn's book successfully introduces the public sphere as a crucial site for the historical discourse regarding this most fascinating icon of modernity.

Bunn is interested in the science that purports to render hidden emotions legible via physiological measurements, and in the society that embraced the technology and allowed it to flourish. These two concerns account for the book's dual structure. The first part is focused on the devel-

opment of the relevant science in nineteenth-century Europe; the second, on the embrace of the technology by twentieth-century American society. Bunn insists throughout that his two investigations are related, as science both responds to social concerns and shapes them.

Bunn starts by roaming through nineteenth-century Europe, to locate the origins of the science of criminology in the growing modern anxieties regarding moral and social order. The Lombrosian school of criminal anthropology, he tells us, was the first to attend to these anxieties by constructing *homo criminalis* as the problem and itself as the solution. The criminal man was conceived as an evolutionary and moral aberration, recognizable by a set of physiological and social markers that criminology promised to identify and control. Bunn adds a twist to this familiar narrative by paying special attention to the elevation of woman as a chief conundrum for the young discipline of criminology. Conjured to possess an intrinsic hidden culpability, the female body provided a site and an impetus for the development of the gaze, theory, and technology that would later play central roles in lie detection.

According to Bunn, *homo criminalis* had to die before the lie detector could be born. In other words, the technology was available early on, but it could be put together for the task of lie detection only after the conception of the criminal as a distinct biological type of human being was replaced with the notion that we all have the potential for criminality. Bunn locates the shift around the turn to the twentieth century, on both sides of the Atlantic, in the discursive imagination of journalists, novelists, and filmmakers who reflected public anxieties, shaped the public's imagination, and presented science with a new agenda—to uncover the hidden guilt of ordinary people.

At this stage, Bunn's social history crosses the Atlantic to the new world, where the challenge was met and the twentieth-century legend of the lie detector was born. At least three people claimed the glory for inventing the machine during the 1920s: William Marston, a lawyer-psychologist from Boston; John Larson, a police scientist from Berkeley, California; and Leonard Keeler, a poet's son and a technical man, who was recruited to help Larson. The intense rivalry that evolved between these three characters fueled much of the early historiography of the lie detector, which has been busy arbitrating their competing claims.

Ken Alder's 2007 *The Lie Detectors* was the first to step away from these debates. He found the identity debate pointless; the true inventor of the lie detector, he argued, was American popular culture. Bunn agrees with Alder, but his approach is different. Alder did not shy away from the larger social questions, but he preferred to approach them obliquely, in poetic forms, which the technology evokes so well. His attempt at the history of America's convoluted love-hate affair with the machine resulted in a dark tale about human ambition and self-deception, based on the biographies of

the individuals who conceived, developed, and marketed the lie detector as a technology of honesty and rationality.

Bunn chooses to tackle head-on the larger questions about the society that embraced the machine and allowed it to flourish. The later chapters of *The Truth Machine* are therefore dedicated to the analysis of American popular culture. One chapter delves into what Bunn calls, following Roland Barthes, America's mythical quest for "euphoric security." Another chapter discusses not the identity but the myth of the American inventor and his technologically enhanced charisma, which, Bunn argues, played a crucial role in establishing the credibility of lie detection in twentieth-century America. The vivid interest in the female body, oh-so-full of secrets, remained strong as well, invariant to the changing of the hemispheres, social phobias, and scientific theories. The final chapter warns us of "The Hazards of the Will to Truth," and expresses concerns about the advance of technologies and social institutions that tend to make machines more human and humans more mechanical.

The Truth Machine still leaves some things to be desired. Its focus on the rise of criminology comes at the expense of other scientific fields that played significant roles in the development of the lie detector, experimental psychology in particular. Future histories will need to consider a fuller scientific spectrum. Also, while the science-culture hybridization works well in each separate part of the book, a discussion as to why it was that the science that evolved in Europe was most warmly adopted by American popular culture would have helped to better tie the two parts of the book together. Still, the work is well-written, and its wide scope, rich evidence, and insightful analysis make it the best introductory text for readers interested in the history of the lie detector.

TAL GOLAN

Tal Golan teaches in the Department of History at the University of California, San Diego.

Radiance from Halcyon: A Utopian Experiment in Religion and Science.

By Paul Eli Ivey. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.
Pp. 328. \$75.

When a splinter group of the Theosophical Society established its own utopian settlement named Halcyon on the central California coast in 1903, it created a community that held in balance the "intuition of religious teachings and the rationality of science" in the search for "material and spiritual progress" (p. 2). Under the early leadership of Dr. William Dower and its first visionary Francia LaDue (also known as Blue Star), the Temple of the People shared a life based on agriculture, craft production, healing, and a belief in the material and spiritual worlds. Paul Eli Ivey draws on an