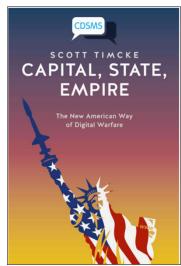Scott Timcke, **Capital, State, Empire: The New American Way of Digital Warfare**, London, UK: University of Westminster Press, 2017, xvii+187 pp., $25 (paperback).

Reviewed by
Sibo Chen
Simon Fraser University, Canada

Scott Timcke's *Capital, State, Empire: The New American Way of Digital Warfare* is a thought-provoking inquiry into how the United States' security apparatuses militarize communication technologies. Following the tradition of radical political economy, the book offers a materialist critique of digital society. It analyzes how new communication technologies facilitate the reproduction of global capitalism under American paramountcy. The central proposition advanced by Timcke is that we have entered an age of digital coercion, with new communication technologies expanding extraction, dispossession, and exploitation, under capitalism.

In the introduction, Timcke begins to set his conceptual framework by echoing Vincent Mosco's (2017) reflection that "scholars who study media and new communication technology tend to ignore the military in favor of examining social media" (p. 1). This presents a perplexing oversight, given the extent to which communication innovations are driven by the needs of digital warfare. The U.S. Department of Defense, for instance, is the world's biggest purchaser of information and communication goods. These purchased goods mediate the structural injustices, stratifications, and inequalities created by the American empire.

Chapter 1 continues this line of argument by offering a materialist critique of digital society. After reviewing the intellectual history of radical political economy, Timcke proceeds to discuss the "historiographic amnesia" (p. 10) embedded in mainstream communication scholarship. The amnesia presents a methodological limitation, as it tends to conceal the coercive commodification underlying communication innovations. To illustrate this argument, Timcke offers two critical observations concerning digital society. First, digital communication has become the latest frontier of capital accumulation efforts. Labor regimes under digital capitalism remain repressive. By decentralizing the workspace, capitalism replaces highly skilled workers with unskilled and easy-to-control ones. Second, data—the central component of the digital mode of production—are tightly controlled, commodified, and surveilled by private corporations and state apparatuses. Data management and analysis continue the objectives of Taylorism by bringing new forms of governance and control.

Chapter 2 offers a historical narrative of U.S. state formation. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of European state formation, in which Timcke reviews Marx's conception of "the state as a relationship between the police and management orientated internally, and military and diplomatic efforts orientated externally" (p. 32). Following this Marxian perspective, Timcke considers the U.S. state formation to be an outcome of intra–ruling class struggle and bargained settlement. His analysis

emphasizes the brutal aspect of settler colonialism, especially the dispossession of indigenous nations and the import of African slaves. The chapter then explores the changes of state-capital relations in the United States from the beginning of the 20th century to the Great Recession in the early 2000s, primarily focusing on how the U.S. ruling class constantly adjusts state apparatuses to maintain structural injustices.

Chapter 3 turns to the development of computational warfare led by the U.S. security apparatuses. The chapter begins with a brief review of social science development during the Cold War era. Digital warfare initiatives, according to Timcke, inherit the Cold War mindset. The chapter then presents a detailed analysis of the prevalence of extrajudicial drone strikes that demonstrates how the U.S. security state militarized communication technologies to circumvent political and legal barriers. The chapter ends with a discussion of the massive surveillance conducted by the National Security Agency. The exposure of the PRISM program, for instance, reveals the extent to which information and communication innovations are deeply entrenched in the U.S. military–industrial complex.

Chapter 4 examines the U.S. security state's domestic operations. The chapter gives primary attention to the recent escalation of police militarization. Timcke considers police brutality as a telling case of how state-sanctioned violence is exerted to maintain social stratification. The exclusion of the most vulnerable has both economic and racial impacts. Black Lives Matter, accordingly, should be understood as a struggle against oppressive state apparatuses. Timcke proses a theoretical move toward a fully fledged intersectional analysis so that the totality of life under neoliberalism, as many African Americans and other disadvantaged minorities experience every day, can be properly analyzed.

Chapter 5 addresses the U.S. security state's international operations. The chapter focuses on how a free trade regime in favor of U.S. capital is backed up by the U.S. military power and its digital components. Timcke proposes that "the US is not only driven by the particular interests of capitalists, but it is burdened with the task of facilitating global capitalism in a world divided into competing nation states" (p. 111). Conceiving international, uneven development as facilitating the expansion and reproduction of capitalism, he further argues that current U.S. military operations are driven by two fundamental concerns. The U.S. security state continues to maintain its oversea presence for (1) securing international circuits of production and (2) responding to the growing press from a global power shift.

Chapter 6 explores the recent developments of quantified cognitive behaviorism. In line with the materialist critique in chapter 1, Timcke offers a cautious tale concerning the unfolding artificial intelligence revolution and the growing pressure of quantification it imposes on social science (e.g., economics and psychology). The computational turn overstates the universality of empirical experiment and deductive–causal logic. Consequently, government practice is increasingly influenced by algorithms, which lead to ahistorical and decontextualized treatments of the heterogeneity within society. To overcome the limits of quantified cognitive behaviorism, Timcke proposes a return to the critical branch of social thought set by C. Wright Mills.

Turning back to the issue of digital coercion, Timcke concludes the book by predicting that there will be an increase of unfree labor, as digital capitalism still follows the doctrine of "accumulation by

dispossession." Under digital coercion, it is difficult for workers to form a unified class consciousness, since subjugation makes them "defer to social pre-political identities that ensure their particularity and otherness" (p. 148).

Within fewer than 200 pages, *Capital, State, Empire* has synthesized a diversified body of research. The book offers a brief, yet thought-provoking analysis of the U.S. security state, and its attention to digital coercion sits well aside other critical inquires of the digital age, such as those of Schiller (2014) and Mosco (2014). The vigorous defense of radical political economy is likely to resonate strongly with readers who are critical of the ahistorical and depoliticized tendency found in some communication studies. It is also worth mentioning that the book's digital version is open access, and efforts like this demonstrate how digital coercion could be fought within academia.

My main criticism, though, is the way the book combines the materialist critique of digital society and the discussion of the U.S. security state. As shown in the chapter overview, the book's argument starts by introducing radical political economy and its materialist analysis of digital coercion. Rather than continuing this line of inquiry, chapter 2 moves to address U.S. state formation. Chapters 3 through 5 mainly focus on examining state-capital relations, and as a result, digital coercion gets only occasional discussion. The critique of quantified cognitive behaviorism in chapter 6 echoes the historical materialism framework in chapter 1, but it also makes the discussion of unfree labor in the conclusion a weird ending point. Meanwhile, for readers without sufficient background knowledge of radical political economy and its general assumptions, some theoretically dense claims in the book could be difficult to understand. As such, the book would have benefited from a less jargon-loaded overview of radical political economy in chapter 1.

With all being said, the book remains a strong argument against the U.S. security state, and it makes a valuable contribution to the study of communication and militarization in the digital age.

References

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