

Neurorhetorics: cybernetics, psychotropics,  
and the materiality of persuasion.

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## **Neurorhetorics: Cybernetics, Psychotropics, and the Materiality of Persuasion**

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### Abstract

This article maps notable moments in, and intersections between, mid-twentieth-century scientific investigations into cybernetics and psychotropics. In particular, it focuses on the two fields' recurring interests in identifying the role of rhetoric, or persuasion, in the various networks (biological, technological, cultural) that surrounded both their scientific investigations and the presentation of such research within their formal disciplines and to the public. The article begins and ends by considering what might be learned from this history in thinking through our possible analyses of, and responses to, the contemporary moment, one in which two phenomena that very much grew from these earlier scientific inquiries—psychopharmacology and human-machine networks—are becoming increasingly ubiquitous.

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This article maps notable moments in, and intersections between, mid-twentieth-century scientific investigations into cybernetics and psychotropics. In particular, it focuses on the two fields' recurring interests in identifying the role of rhetoric, or persuasion, in the various networks (biological, technological, cultural) that surrounded both their scientific investigations and the presentation of such research within their formal disciplines and to the public. The article begins and ends by considering what might be learned from this history in thinking through our possible analyses of, and responses to, the contemporary moment, one in which two phenomena that very much grew from these earlier scientific inquiries—psychopharmacology and human-machine networks—are becoming increasingly ubiquitous.

"The cultural-technological standards do not represent Man and his Norm. They articulate and decompose bodies that are already dismembered."

Friedrich Kittler<sup>1</sup>

"Will the turning point not be elsewhere, in the place where the brain is 'subject,' where it becomes subject? It is the brain that thinks and not man—the latter being only a cerebral crystallization."

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari<sup>2</sup>

1. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, trans. Michael Metteer, with Chris Cullens (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 215.

2. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 210.



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