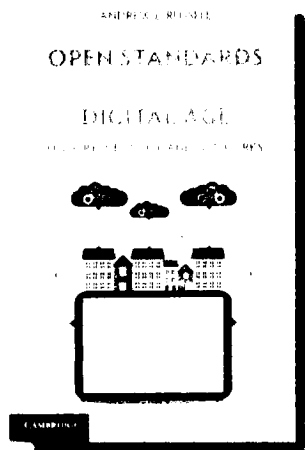


Open Standards and the Digital Age: History, Ideology, and Networks

Andrew L. Russell/Cambridge University Press/2014/316 pp./\$32.99 (sb)



Open source, open network, open systems: the ubiquitous term "open" is central to digital culture. In *Open Standards and the Digital Age: History, Ideology, and Networks*, Andrew L. Russell offers an historical account of the "open" that uncovers the foundations of open systems and puts those systems into context. By rejecting conventional teleological accounts of the relationship between technology and society, Russell positions his historical study as a work of criticism that

traces both ideological shifts and material developments in information and communication technologies (ICT). Russell locates the development of open systems within midcentury ICT engineers' championing of Western modernity by emphasizing the way that their collective labor implicitly and explicitly

rejected isolationism, fascism, and repression. The resulting history identifies moments when our cultural and technological episteme shifted in response to critical disruptions and "collective acts of recomposition and invention" (5) by ICT engineers in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By identifying these shifts and the networks of people, innovations, and material developments that they created, Russell's work opens space for reading the establishment of standards and systems as a critique of centralized control. As such, Russell's mode of historical research suggests that we read the accretion of data, people, and changes in collective culture as productive critique. The text is compelling and lucid even as it is densely historical and loaded with acronyms. Each chapter illustrates a different element of the conscious design behind standardization. Russell's map of the epistemological network that constitutes a history of the open offers us a richly figured glimpse into the relationship between neoliberalism and technological innovation. If we follow Russell's carefully constructed logic, we find that the story of the open is a story of the ways that cooperation and standardization function as rejections of closed, centralized power systems.

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