

Syllabus

Architectural Infrastructures and Cultural Techniques

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Thursday 11am-1pm

300S Buell Hall

Spring 2014

This doctoral research seminar will consider recent scholarship that focuses on architectural infrastructures, which we will relate to the notion of “cultural techniques” (or cultural technologies, *Kulturtechniken*) and its precursors in media theory and history.

“Architectural infrastructures” denotes any and all infrastructural systems and processes, from construction systems to services to furniture to hardware to visualizations to paperwork to social apparatuses of any sort, including buildings. It also includes any and all of the affective or semantic consequences and determinations associated with these systems. More than defining a class of objects, the term enables a way of seeing and thinking about the architectural rather than about architecture, by displacing the latter as an a priori category.

“Cultural techniques” refers to the realm of technical mediation that both conditions and is conditioned by the social and artistic spheres in which the architectural comes into being. The term *Kulturtechniken*, and a literature loosely associated with it, has circulated for the past two decades in German and more recently, in partial English translation. Narrowly, it elaborates on the work of the late German media philosopher Friedrich Kittler. More broadly, “cultural techniques” allow us to pose questions “concerning technology,” including questions related to causality, to poetics, and to politics, in realms well beyond those of technical media as traditionally understood.

The seminar, then, will explore architectural infrastructures as cultural techniques, and vice versa.

Requirements

Students are expected to participate in class discussion, present at least one reading to the class, and write a research paper, the subject matter of which is to be determined in individual meetings during office hours.

All required books are available in Bookculture, except those marked with an asterisk (*), which are available in Avery Library. All articles are available online unless otherwise indicated.

Readings

NOTE: In addition to the weekly readings and seminar discussions, we will hold a special session with Stefan Andriopoulos and Brian Larkin, conveners of the University Seminar on the Theory and History of Media, at a date and time to be determined. Readings for this session are list at the end of the syllabus.

1. Introduction: Precursors

(Students should familiarize themselves with these texts with which they are not already familiar through the course of the semester)

*Lewis Mumford, Technics and Civilization (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Co. 1934); reprint edition (Chicago: University of

Chicago Press, 2010)

*Sigfried Giedion, Mechanization Takes Command: A Contribution to Anonymous History (New York, W. W. Norton, 1948)

Further reference

Reyner Banham, The Architecture of the Well-Tempered Environment (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969)

Reyner Banham, A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture 1900-1925 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986)

Reyner Banham, Megastructure: Urban Futures of the Recent Past (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976)

Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," "The Turning," and "The Age of the World Picture," in The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in Poetry, Language, Thought, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York, Harper Collins, 1975).

Donald MacKenzie and Judy Wajcman, eds. The Social Shaping of Technology, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999)

Lewis Mumford, Art and Technics (New York, Columbia University Press, 1952)

PART 1: Cultural Techniques

2. Discourse Networks

Required

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

Further reference

Bernhard Siegert, Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System, trans. Kevin Repp (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)

3. Media Archaeology

Required

Friedrich A. Kittler, Gramophone, Film, Typewriter [1986], trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999)

Further reference

Friedrich A. Kittler, "The City Is a Medium," trans. Matthew Griffin, New Literary History 27, no. 4 (Autumn 1996), pp. 717-729.

Friedrich Kittler, "Computer Graphics: A Semi-Technical Introduction," trans. Sara Ogger, Grey Room 2 (Winter 2001): 30-45. JSTOR

Friedrich Kittler, "Perspective and the Book," trans. Sara Ogger, Grey Room 5 (Autumn 2001): 38-53. JSTOR

Friedrich A. Kittler, Optical Media: Berlin Lectures 1999, trans. Anthony Enns (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010)

Friedrich A. Kittler, "On the Relation of Art and Techne," lecture, European Graduate School, <http://www.egs.edu/faculty/friedrich-kittler/videos/the-relation-of-art-and-techne/>

"Friedrich Kittler: The Sirens Go Silent," conference at New York University, 14-16 March, 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xPLgiYCZ18>

Jussi Parikka, What Is Media Archaeology? (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2012)

4. Cultural Techniques

Required

"Cultural Techniques," special issue edited by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, Ilinca Iurascu, and Jussi Parikka, Theory, Culture & Society 30, no. 6 (November 2013) SAGE JOURNALS <http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/30/6.toc>

Bernhard Siegert, "Doors: On the Materiality of the Symbolic," trans. John Durham Peters, Grey Room 47 (Spring 2012): 6-23.

Further reference

"New German Media Theory," special issue edited by Eva Horn, Grey Room 29 (Fall 2007) JSTOR or <http://www.mitpressjournals.org/toc/grey/-/29>

Wolfgang Ernst, Digital Memory and the Archive (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012)

5. Things

Required

Bill Brown, ed., Things (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

(Based on Critical Inquiry 28, special issue on "Thing Theory," Autumn 2001)

Further reference

Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," Critical Inquiry 28, No. 1 (Autumn 2001): 1-22.

Bill Brown, A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004)

Bruno Latour, "The Berlin Key or How to Do Words with Things," trans. Lydia Davis, in P. M. Graves-Brown, Matter, Materiality and Modern Culture (London: Routledge, 2000), 10-21. <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/384>

Bruno Latour, We Have Never Been Modern, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)

6. Paperwork

Required

Cornelia Vismann, Files: Law and Media Technology, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008)

Further reference

Matthew Hull, Government of Paper: The Materiality of Bureaucracy in Urban Pakistan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012)

Ben Kafka, The Demon of Writing: Powers and Failures of Paperwork (New York: Zone Books, 2012)

Marcus Krajewski, Paper Machines: About Cards and Catalogues, 1548-1929, trans. Peter Krapp (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011)

7. Intermedia

Required

N. Catherine Hayles, My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

Alexander R. Galloway, The Interface Effect (New York: Polity Press, 2012)

PART 2: Architectural Infrastructures

8. Structure and Statics

Required

Adrian Forty, Concrete and Culture: A Material History (London: Reaktion Books, 2012)

Further reference

Kenneth Frampton, Studies in Tectonic Culture: The Poetics of Construction in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Architecture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001)

Andrew Saint, Architect and Engineer: A Study in Sibling Rivalry (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007)

9. Technical Infrastructures

Required

Emily Thompson, The Soundscape of Modernity: Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1933 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004)

Further reference

David Nye, The American Technological Sublime (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996)

10. Machine-Organism

Required

Christina Cogdell, Eugenic Design: Streamlining America in the 1930s (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004)

Further reference

Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell, eds., Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Cultures in the 1930s (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2006)

11. The Art of Governing

Required

Aggregate, Governing by Design: Architecture, Economy, and Politics in the Twentieth Century (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012)

Further reference

Timothy Hyde, Constitutional Modernism: Architecture and Civil Society in Cuba, 1933-1959 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013)

12. Thresholds

Required

Georges Teyssot, A Topology of Everyday Constellations (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013)

Further reference

Robin Evans, "Figures, Doors and Passages," Architectural Design 48, no. 4 (1978): 267-278.

Mark Jarzombek, "Corridor Spaces," Critical Inquiry 36, no. 4 (Summer 2010): 728-770. JSTOR

Georg Simmel, "Bridge and Door," trans. Mark Ritter, Theory, Culture & Society 11, no. 5 (February 1994): 5-10. SAGE JOURNALS <http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/11/1/5.full.pdf+html>

13. Networks

Required

John Harwood, The Interface: IBM and the Transformation of Corporate Design: 1945-1976 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011)

Further reference

Paul N. Edwards, The Closed World: Computers and the Politics of Discourse in Cold War America (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997)

Sean Keller, "Fenland Tech: Architectural Science in Postwar Cambridge," Grey Room 23 (Spring 2006): 40-65. JSTOR

14. Institutions

Required

*Arindam Dutta, ed., A Second Modernism: MIT, Architecture, and the "Techno-Social Moment" (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), selections.

Special session, TBD

Stefan Andriopoulos, "Kant's Magic Lantern: Historical Epistemology and Media Archaeology, Representations 115, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 42-70. JSTOR

Brian Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure," The Annual Review of Anthropology 42 (2013): 327-343.
<http://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-anthro-092412-155522>