Columbia University
Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation

A4515: Network Culture. The History of the Contemporary

Fall 2014

Professor   **Kazys Varnelis**

Description

The purpose of this seminar is to come to an advanced historical understanding of the changed conditions that characterize our networked age. As a history of the contemporary, the seminar is organized around a series of topics tracing a genealogy of present-day culture, focusing on the network not merely as a technology with social ramifications but rather as a cultural dominant that connects changes in society, economy, aesthetics, urbanism, and ideology. It is a primary thesis of this course that the network is not an innocent technology but rather a social construction that serves to naturalize and exacerbate uneven growth and the distribution of power.

Topics to be addressed include network theory, changing concepts of time and space, the rise of networked publics, contemporary poetics, new forms of subjectivity, and methods of control. Throughout, we will make connections between architecture, urbanism and this insurgent condition.

Requirements

Participation: 20%

Each class will consist of a presentation by the instructor on selected themes, followed by an in-depth discussion in seminar. Students are expected to prepare all readings in order to facilitate a discussion in which all participate. Active participation by all students in each session is required.

Reading Journal: 20%

Students will submit responses to assigned readings at the last class of every month. This may consist of typed responses, a minimum of 300 words per reading, or original PDFs with annotations (for example, in Acrobat or Skim). Responses may be handwritten, but must be legible. Responses may be in terms of bullet points, but again, must be understandable to another reader. Students should think of this as a matter of making the readings understandable to others.

All readings will be available on-line. An asterisk denotes foundational texts of particular importance that set the context for more recently written readings.

Term Project: 80%

For a term project, students have an option of either undertaking a research project or an essay. Either is due on Friday, December 12.

The research project option consists of field research carefully presented together with a 2,000-word essay. (roughly 10 pages double spaced, 12 points) accompanying the research.

Students should take a critical text from the 1960s/1970s that examined the interface between humans and their environment and update it, using original research and fieldwork (for example photography and film) for the present day to explore the impact of network culture on the previous condition.

Desmond Morris, *Manwatching: A Field Guide to Human Behavior* (later *Peoplewatching*) Hertsfordshire, UK: Triad/Panther Books, 1977.

William Whyte, *the Social Life of Small Urban Spaces,* New York: Conservation Foundation, 1980.
Colin Ward, *The Child in the City,* London, Architectural Press, 1977.
Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities,* New York, Vintage Books, 1961

If students choose to write an essay, they should turn in an essay of roughly 4,000 words (roughly 20 pages double spaced, 12 points).

Plagiarism of any sort will result in immediate failure.
See http://www.arch.columbia.edu/resources/gsapp-policies/plagiarism

01	09.05	**Introduction**

02	09.12	**An Overview of Networks**

Required:

Manuel Castells, "Informationalism, Networks, and the Network Society: A Theoretical Blueprint. In Castells, ed. *The Network Society: A Cross-cultural Perspective* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2004), 3-45.

Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on Control Societies," *Negotiations, 1972-1990* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 177-182.

Charlie Gere, "The Beginnings of Digital Culture," *Digital Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2008), 21-50.

Recommended:

Kazys Varnelis, "Conclusion: The Meaning of Network Culture," *Networked Publics,* 145-163.

03   09.19   **Network Theory**

Required:

* Stanley Milgram, "The Small-World Problem," *Psychology Today,* vol 1, no 1 (May 1967), 61-67.

Albert-László Barabási, "Six Degrees of Separation," "Small Worlds," and "Hubs and Connectors," *Linked: The New Science of Networks* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus, 2002), 25-64.

Nicholas Carr, "From the Many to the Few" *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World from Edison to Google* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008), 127-149.

Chris Anderson, "The Long Tail," *Wired,* October 2004, http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/12.10/tail.html

Clay Shirky, "Power Laws, Weblogs and Inequality," *Clay Shirky's Writings About the Internet.* http://www.shirky.com/writings/powerlaw_weblog.html

Recommended:

* Mark S. Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties," *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (May 1973), 1360-1380.

AUDC (Robert Sumrell and Kazys Varnelis), "The Milgram Experiment," *Praxis 14*, 2014.

Duncan J. Watts, "The Connected Age," *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age,* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 19-42.

04   09.26   **Control**

Required:

* Norbert Wiener, "Cybernetics in History," *The Human Use of Human Beings,* (New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1954), 15-28.

Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, "The Californian Ideology," http://www.hrc.wmin.ac.uk/theory-californianideology-main.html.

Saskia Sassen, "Electronic space and power," *Journal of Urban Technology* 4 (1997): 1-17.

Alexander R. Galloway, "Physical Media," *Protocol: How Control Exists after Decentralization,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 29-53.

Jeffrey Nealon, "Once More, With Intensity, Foucault's History of Power Revisited," *Foucault Beyond Foucault,* 24-53.

Recommended:

Saskia Sassen, "On Concentration and Centrality in the Global City," Paul L. Knox and Peter J. Taylor, eds., *World Cities in a World-System* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 63-78.

Stephen Graham, "Communication Grids: Cities and Infrastructure," in Saskia Sassen, *Global Networks. Linked Cities* (London: Routledge, 2002), 71-92.

Kevin Phillips, "Preface," "Introduction. The Panic of August," "Finance: The New Real Economy?" *Bad Money.* (New York: Penguin, 2009), xi-lxxiv and 1-68.

05   10.03   **Class held 12-2, Lunchtime Event with Astra Taylor, Andrew Blum, and Leah Meisterlin**

Reading TBA

06   10.10   **Postmodernism and Periodization**

Required:

*Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146 (July/August 1984): 53-92.

David Harvey, "Fordism" and "From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation," in *The Condition of Postmodernity,* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1989), 125-172.

Jeffrey Nealon, "Genealogies of Capitalism: Foucault with Deleuze and Jameson," *Foucault Beyond Foucault,* 54-73.

Recommended:

Hal Foster, "Postmodernism: A Preface," in Hal Foster, ed., *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (Townsend, Washington: Bay Press, 1983), ix-xvi.

Jean François Lyotard, "introduction" "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" *Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), xxiii-xxv, 71-82.

07   Time

Required: Jean Baudrillard, "The End of the Millennium or the Countdown," *Economy & Society* 26 (1997): 447-55.

Bruce Sterling, "Atemporality for the Creative Artist," http://www.transmediale.de/en/keynote-bruce-sterling-us-atemporality

transcribed: http://www.wired.com/beyond_the_beyond/2010/02/atemporality-for-the-creative-artist/

08	10.24	Space

Required:

* Michel Foucault, "Docile Bodies," *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 135-156.

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, "Capitalist Sovereignty, Or Administering the Global Society of Control," *Empire* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 325-350.

Marc Augé, "Prologue" and "From Places to Non-Places," in *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity,* (London; New York: Verso, 1995), 1-6. 75-115.

Recommended:

Hans Ibelings, "Supermodernism," *Supermodernism* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 1998), 55-102.

Kazys Varnelis and Marc Tuters, "Beyond Locative Media: Giving Shape to the Internet of Things," *Leonardo* 39, No. 4 (2006): 357–363.

09	10.31	**Subjectivity**

Required:

* Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *On Individuality and Social Forms,* ed. David Levine, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 324-339.

Kenneth J. Gergen, "Social Saturation and the Populated Self," *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 48-80.

Brian Holmes, "The Flexible Personality. For a New Cultural Critique," *Transversal,* http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/1106/holmes/en

Recommend:

Jeffrey Nealon, "Once More, With Intensity, Foucault's History of Power Revisited," *Foucault Beyond Foucault,* 24-53.

Warren Neidich, "From Noopower to Neuropower: How Mind Becomes Matter," Cognitive Architecture: From Bio-politics to Noo-politics; Architecture & Mind in the Age of Communication and Information (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 2010), 538-581.

10   11.07   **Publics**

Required:

* Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere, An Encyclopedia Article," *New German Critique* No. 3 (Autumn, 1974), 49-55.

Yochai Benkler, "Chapter 1. Introduction: A Moment of Opportunity and Challenge" and "Chapter 4. The Economics of Social Production," *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 1-28 and 91-127.

Recommended:

Bill Wausik, "My Crowd. Or Phase 5: A Report from the Inventor of the Flash Mob," *Harper's Magazine* (March 2006), 56-66.

Bill Bishop, The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 1-77.

Selections from Michael J. Weiss, The Clustered World: How We Live, What We Buy, and What it All Means About Who We Are (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1999).

11   11.14   **Poetics**

Required:

* "The Medium is the Message" and ""Media Hot and Cold" in Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extension of Man, *The MIT Press*

Geert Lovink, "Blogging: The Nihilist Impulse," *Eurozine* (2007), http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-01-02-lovink-en.html

Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002), 7-48.

Recommended:

Alan Liu, *The Laws of Cool: Knowledge Work and the Culture of Information,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), excerpts.

Jordan Crandall, "Showing," http://jordancrandall.com/showing/index.html

| 12 | 11.21 | **Complexity / Conclusion** |

Required:

* Robert Venturi, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture,* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1977), 13-32.

Joseph A. Tainter, "Introduction to Collapse," *The Collapse of Complex Societies,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1-21.

Recommended:

Charles Perrow, "Normal Accident at Three Mile Island." *Society* 18, no. 5 (1981): 17–26.