Syllabus

Architectural Infrastructures and Cultural Techniques

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A8906
Thursday 11am-1pm
3005 Buell Hall
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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)


Further reference


**PART 1: Cultural Techniques**

2. Discourse Networks

Required


Further reference


3. Media Archaeology

Required


Further reference


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


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


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

Further reference


6. Paperwork

Required


Further reference


7. Intermedia

Required


PART 2: Architectural Infrastructures

8. Structure and Statics

Required


Further reference


9. Technical Infrastructures

Required


Further reference


10. Machine-Organism

Required


Further reference

11. The Art of Governing
Required

Further reference

12. Thresholds
Required

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

13. Networks
Required

Further reference

14. Institutions
Required

Special session, TBD
Stefan Andriopoulos, “Kant’s Magic Lantern: Historical Epistemology and Media Archaeology,” *Representations* 115, no. 1 (Summer 2011): 42-70. JSTOR