

Technics: Technologies, Techniques

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Fall 2014

Tu. 2-5; Conference Room

Office hours: by appt. (Th. afternoon)

General Description:

The interrelation of material affordances and technologies and techniques—technics, in short—constitutes a central aspect of trans-species existence (“species” itself being a technical outcome). Sound, no less than other matter, participates in this technical constitution, as does “music,” broadly conceived. The technical constitution of societies is widely accepted, if debated, as seen in the dynamics of determinism and non-determinism, the cultivation of bodily techniques, ideas and practices of accumulation, expenditure, inscription, labor, storage, and transmission, and the definition of the human, the post-human, and the before-the-human.

This seminar will take a long view (and listening) at the history and historicity of this interrelation, engaging work from anthropology (and paleo-anthropology), media and communication, critical theory and philosophy, science and technology studies, and music studies to explore ways of understanding and historicizing music and sound. This, however, is not a seminar on musical technologies, or STS-informed musicology, although students will very much be encouraged to work on these areas. Topics include: human-non human interactions; myth as sonorous techno-poiesis; paleo-instrumentality; zootechnics and anthropotechnics; perceptual and sensory prostheses.

Readings from, among others, Benjamin, Crary, Darwin, DeLanda, Derrida, Foucault, Gitelman, Hadot, Hayles, Haraway, Heidegger, Ihde, Kittler, Latour, Leroi-Gourhan, Lévi-Strauss, Ludueña, Marx, Mauss, Ochoa Gautier, Simondon, Stiegler, Tomlinson, Uexküll, Weheliye.

Work:

- 1) In-depth discussion of readings constitutes the main task of the seminar. For each set of readings, all students (it is a small group) will post their commentaries on the readings, with a focus on specific and salient concepts that you feel need discussion, clarification, expansion, and questioning. Comments should fall within the 350-700 word range (one to two pages, 12 point font, double space), and you can use a combination of prose and bullet points. Your commentary **MUST BE** posted at least 24 hours before seminar. You are invited to offer alternative media to share your ideas – videos, images, sound or music recordings, for example.

Starting on the third week, one seminar participant will coordinate the discussion; we will rotate this responsibility. It will be the coordinator responsibility to bring questions to the others' comments as a way to guide the conversation.

Suggestions for organizing comments:

- Identify a particular concept, first paraphrasing the author(s)
- Follow this with critical commentary – how is author supporting a given argument, what motivations does s/he have to do the work s/he is doing, and state what you think of the argument and concept
- Keep in mind that critical commentary must discern between the author's frame and your own; avoid stating what you wish s/he would have said
- Keep in mind that we are traversing a wide range of temporal and spatial coordinates; avoid presentist critiques by situating the author within her/his work and discipline (this requires that you find out about authors you are not familiar with) and carry out your own commentary with these contingencies in mind
- It may be helpful sometimes to compare authors in a given set of readings, or to begin doing the work of synthesis that links readings from week to week and throughout the semester
- It may be useful sometimes to focus on a very specific statement and engage in close readings, though try at all times to link this to wider concerns

You are invited (strongly encouraged) to revise your commentaries following in-class discussions. Likewise, you are invited to comment on your colleagues' commentaries and in-class discussions after seminar meeting. Remember that one of the true pleasures of graduate seminars is that we all teach each other, something that, alas, becomes rare as professional protocols impinge on our modes of knowledge exchange and production – seriously!

Should you use other media, please make sure to frame the object in a way that communicates to your viewers and/or listeners what your critical angle on a reading, idea, concept, issue, etc. may be.

- 2) Befitting an advanced graduate seminar, we will produce an end-of-semester project. In this seminar, we will engage in collaborative work. Once the group settles, we will divide it into two, aiming at a broad representation of methodologies, archives, and scholarly interests – political too, it goes without saying. The idea is to develop a project – for example, “translating technologies” or “multiple musical and audile ‘literacies’” – in which collectively the group members use a problem or issue as a prism into conceptual, theoretical, and empirical matters. You will develop and experiment in the course of your work with a wide repertoire of strategies to carry your ideas out: what resources and approaches might your “problem” or “object” require? You will develop an archive to work on – it can be ethnographic, documentary, analog, digital, etc. –

and will narrow down the many issues that result from preliminary discussion into a manageable set of questions. Your project will provide answers to these questions, examine the very process by which the questions were originated and engages, the methodologies that you had to develop in order to do your work, and the theoretical presuppositions you had to contend with.

You will present a preliminary version of your project to the seminar, and we will aim to do a public presentation of the groups. You are encouraged to engage in multi-media formats and to engage creatively with your objects. Each group will present as well a reasoned account of your project in a document the written content of which should not exceed 3500 words.

For all projects:

- By Nov. 1, you should consult with me if you have not found a way into this kind connection – it is not easy, given the material.
- By Nov. 15, you should present a reasoned account of your topic, the relevance to your work, how you want to pursue your arguments, what case studies you wish to explore (if this is the case), and a working bibliography.
- I encourage you to explore ways in which the readings may bear on musical, musicological, ethnographic, and/or theoretical issues.
- In-seminar presentations will be scheduled according to our progress, and we will try to do public presentations in January. Your reasoned account will be due a week after the initial presentations.

Schedule (subject to revision; consult Canvas course site):

PART 1: TECHNE, the first 2000 years (or so)

Sept. 2: Introduction – (a) technics: a terminological constellation; (b) techniques; (c) analytical frameworks

Sept. 9: (Em)bodied Technical Concerns and Forms

Engels, Friedrich. “On the Part Played by Labor in the Transition from Ape to Man”

Foucault, Michel. “Technologies of the Self”

Hertz, Robert. “The Pre-Eminence of the Right Hand: A Study in Religious Polarity”

Ilde, Don. *Embodied Technics* (excerpts)

Mauss, Marcel. “Techniques of the Body”

Sudnow, David. *Ways of the Hand*

Sept. 16: (European) Modernity's Anxieties

- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"
- Buck-Morss, Susan. "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered." *October*, 62 (1992): 3-41.
- Desideri, Fabrizio. "The Mimetic Bond: Benjamin and the Question of Technology," in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York: Continuum, 2005), 108-120.
- Dreyfus, Hubert and Charles Spinosa, "Heidegger and Borgmann on How to Affirm Technology"
- Hanssen, Beatrice. "Benjamin or Heidegger: Aesthetics and Politics in an Age of Technology," in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin ((New York: Continuum, 2005), 73-92.
- Ihde, Don. *Technics and Praxis*, (1979), 103-129
- Patke, Rajeev S. "Benjamin on Art and Reproducibility: The Case of Music," in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (New York: Continuum, 2005), 185-208.
- Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology"

Sept 23: Modernity's Aspirations

- Marx and Engels, *Capital; Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy; The German Ideology; Dialectics of Nature* (Engels)
- McLuhan, Marshall. "Introduction," "Medium is the Message," and "Media Hot and Cold," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), 3-32.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962), 18-64, 159-231, 249-271.

PART 2: PALEOTECHNICS and INDIVIDUATION

Sept. 30: Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*

Munford, Lewis. *The Myth of the Machine; Knowledge Among Men*

Oct. 7: Simondon, Gilbert. "Technical Mentality"

- Combes, Muriel. *Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual*
- Hayward and Geoghegan, "Catching up with Simondon"
- Hansen, Mark. "Engineering Pre-individual Potentiality: Technics, Transindividuation and 21st-Century Media"

PART 3: THE TECHNICAL and THE SPECULATIVE

Oct. 14: No class

Oct. 21: Beardsworth, Richard. "From a Genealogy of Matter to a Politics of Memory: Stiegler's Thinking of Technics"

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology* (excerpts)

Stiegler, Bernhard. *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*

PART 4: AUDIOTECHNIA, OCULARTECHNIA, ETHNOTECHNIA

Oct. 28: Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*

Horn, Eva, "There Are No Media," *Grey Room* 29 (Fall 2007)

Gitelman, Lisa. *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era*

Siegert, Bernhard. "Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory," *Theory, Culture & Society* (Fall 2013)

Nov. 4: Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer*

Zielinski, Siegfried. *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means*

Nov. 11: Denning, Michael. "Decolonizing the Ear"

Eshun, Kodwo. *More Brilliant than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*.

Veal, Michael. *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (excerpts)

Weheliye, Alexander. *Phonographies: Grooves in Sonic Afro-Modernity* (excerpts)

PART 5: HUMAN/POSTHUMAN

Nov. 18: Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late

Twentieth Century"

Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics,*

Literature, and Informatics (excerpts)

Wolfe, Cary. *What is Posthumanism*

Nov. 25: Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (excerpts)

Hansen, Mark. *New Philosophy for New Media* (excerpts)

EPILOGUE: ANTHROPO- and ZOOTECHNIAS

Dec. 2: Ochoa Gautier, Ana María. *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia*

von Uexküll, Jakob. "A Stroll Through the World of Animals and Men: A Picture Book of Invisible Worlds"

Dec. 9: Presentations