

STS.464 :: The Intellectual History of Technology

Modernism: Socioeconomic and Aesthetic 12 April 2005

Coming Up

Last day of class: we will meet early for lunch. Be prepared to talk about the central idea of your paper.

George Kateb's essay anticipates DeLillo: *White Noise* as death fear, the remaking of the world as our answer to mortality, a sort of collective neurosis of humans.

New York Times Op/Ed recently: Culture of Death/Culture of Life, current events surrounding Terry Schiavo

Discussion of final paper: 5-10 pp, double spaced, typed; perhaps think of it as a manifesto...

Last Class: Revisiting Systems

How do we envisage the relationship between ordinary life and this "network society"? How does it cope with our creaturely, animal needs? Leo wishes Castells would address this.

The system doesn't obliterate our creaturely being. Is this a problem for the systems folks?

Are these needs simply constrained by the system? Do the needs keep coming up against the system?

Castells's description is not necessarily an approving one.

These systems arose to *address* bodily needs, but in the late 20th century they also around discomforts as strong as those they satisfy.

Sewer systems as making invisible such things: removal from our own waste, bodily processes?

Today in Class

Everyone will talk a bit about their papers so far.

50 years ago today: Polio vaccine (12 April 1955)

Discussion of Readings and Papers

Laura's Paper

- dislocation theme
- people transformed by the machine, the soul
- "the machine and the soul"
- response of the imageless art in the art world
- technology is material: abstract art aligned with this dissociation from the material? also, an individual, personal expression of it
- *The Education of Henry Adams*
 - Henry Adams's "historical neckbreaking"
 - See the paragraph in *The Education of Henry Adams*, Chapter 25, p. 382 beginning with "Historians undertake to arrange sequences..."
 - "Chaos is the law of nature; order is the dream of man." → motto for today's class and an encapsulation of Henry Adams's theory.
 - Also, see Chapter 33, p. 474, the paragraph beginning with "A dynamic theory..."
 - Logic connecting the force to the neck-breaking: "the sudden irruption of forces totally new"?

Melissa's Paper

- *The Education of Henry Adams*, Chapter 33, p. 476, the paragraph beginning with "To the highest attractive energy..."
 - force inside (which leads to education; which names these forces; which creates new forces)
 - forces of nature
 - The Dynamo and the Virgin
 - * reproduction, fertility, the infinite
 - * sublimation
 - * attests to the power of reproduction by denying it
 - * hunger → desire
 - * forces wholly new that you can't see
 - * the power of religion and the power of technology
- the dialectic between the material and the soul

Leo on the Papers

Two views of abstract art and the mechanic arts:

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1. abstract art as a protest against materialism
 2. nonrepresentational art takes away the subject matter, the image, and puts the emphasis on the materials of the art itself

Can it be both a protest and a new way of celebrating the technical? A protest against representation?

Emphasizing the *madness* of the thing (the (art) object)

Thomas's Paper

Discussion of cinema...

Art as technology without function?

A new realm of representation?

Seeing beauty in new ways, stretching of the mind/reframing required.

→ Does this go against/supersede the physicality of being moved in the same way? Appreciating it in a different way? "Supersensual"?

Exmaples of historical neckbreaking:

- Einstein
- electricity
- Curies, radium, the X-ray

Modernism: breaking up of traditional narrative structures, intoxicated with the tool of the camera, voracious eye (e.g. *Ulysses*).

Around the Table: An Overview of Everyone's Paper

- technology and gender, woman/femaleness, sex
scientific motherhood
professionalization of womanhood
modern art as museless art
- gendering of nature, virgin
conception of force
phenomenon of exhibitions and what they choose to put on display
- force and machines
nature and machine

yearning for the divine and the conflation of these
film similar to exhibition: trying to see everything
representation of the world
city and world
technology of movie cinema
instrument through which the filmer's desire is captured
the chaos of the city
consumer and products (department store!)

- how modern art could be viewed as resistance to appropriation of nature by machine
futurist manifesto as ultimate appropriation
- Coney Island, emergence of amusement parks
speed related to amusement parks
anticipation of what will happen next
- fusion of organism and mechanism, people + machines = system
supersystem
"technology" needed to talk of this fusion
close relationships to capitalism
modern art as a reflection on this accelerating fusion
can no longer be decoupled
- disillusionment with technology
blindness of faith in progress and technology
using technology to teach children
existential issue
- shift in perspective given by plane and automobile
acceleration
the physical feeling of acceleration
seeing things faster/from a distance
frames of reference and Einstein
 - interesting analogy to our problem
 - need a new paradigm
 - the machine doesn't fit anymore
 - gaps in the industrial/machine paradigmhow Adams anticipates this
Apollo photos of the earth
- phenomenon of exhibition in displacing power
removal of machine from its context and placing it in the exhibition
comparison of these exhibitions
art is an analytical mechanism

technology mediating between art and machine

- how technology and art are related
- Veblen and the machine process
art (non-practical?) and engineering (practical?)
- new relations between mechanic and fine arts
how futurists responded to new mechanic arts (e.g. the automobile)
the removal of the machine from the factory
levels of detachment, interactions
artists becoming engineers?
mechanic arts' relation to production and consumption
maybe this is why Marx didn't need "technology"
connections with labor → labor drops out
- concentrating on a passage from *The Education of Henry Adams*
the power of naming and language
the accomplishment of language
naming: calling forth a thing, congregating around the name
cohesion around the name → a form of control
technology as naming
facilitating the process of developing new things
Chapter 34, page 498, the paragraph beginning with "To educate — one's self to begin with..."
 - we've always reacted to technological change, but next time we're not going to be fast enough
 - exponential enlargement of force/power of humans

Next Week: Engineering

The role of engineering in modern education.

Post-WWI, 1930s → a challenge of mechanic arts, crisis of international capitalism, trying to think of alternatives

Veblen: idealist of the machine age, engineers' value system puts efficiency at the top, engineers as moral superiors

Technocracy movement of the 1930s: "technology" now a safe term, the psychic effects of working with machinery

Noble: chemical and electrical engineering