This dimension has become the new Ninety-nine percent of sending love letters, and hundreds of thousands of it’s easy to forget that the six modern society, this is the cable, millions of tiny blinking at once, plop down, one after one 160-acre warehouses, large Sharon has poked you. Large, and the number of times pictures from middle school, servers that hold our profile Prineville, Oregon THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF OUR TIME - New York in 1799, with the sole ever really been public? The question: has infrastructure and controlled, we ask the spaces are privately held government, a public service. of “public works.” Along with water, roads, or electricity—are those of “mission critical facilities” because of the potential business fallout that could occur if the facility went down or severe, in other words, the mission is to make money, and the potential to lose money makes this situation inherently critical. The building systems are redundant; they use multiple paths of power, cooling, and ventilation. These buildings and their systems require such a specific set of knowledge there are only about 4 or 5 architects responsible for designing all of them—in the world. Tomorrow’s roads and canals, sewers and bridges, tomorrow’s infrastructure is being designed inside a vacuum, by the 5 people. Surely this isn’t the way we pictured the future.1

As an integral part of the global reproduction of value, we need to perceive, visualize, and represent other-wise invisible relationships. We exist not just as outsiders, giving commentary at a distance, but we are limited to being cogs in the global machine of production. It is our responsi-bility to be critical of the system itself, even as we help to construct it. Christine Mondor

Infrastructure space, with the power and currency of software, is an operating system for shaping the... Kellar Eastering

Contrary to the infrastructure of roads and train tracks, the digital highways of now are privately laid, owned, and maintained. Access is not an inherent right, and whether or not net neutrality dies, the dissemination of modern information has always been controlled privately. Trent Wimbiscus

INTER·MISSION we need the news on our phone (or read it at all), draw on our tablets, and write love letters on our computers. What happened to paper? Surely, we don’t all care about trees that much. This is a critical moment in the question of the dissipation of information into TID characters that illuminate our face, the information stuck somewhere in our second brain. We provide you with a new format: a piece of paper, tablet, dupe printed. Each issue explores a new topic, through words and images. It’s a space, we hope the people we talk to will help you turn on, tune in, and drop out. Today, it is more important than ever to slow down, disarm, process, and reflect. And what better way to do this than reading more content? Take a break, and sit down with us.

The infrastructure of our Time - Kyle Wing

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IN CONVERSATION WITH CHRISTINE MONDOR

What is your reaction to Keller Easterling’s work related to “Medium Design” and the relationships between unplanned systems of power?

CM: What Easterling describes as Medium Design aligns with our studies from the early 1990s on the semiotics of networks enabled by infrastructure. We only produce declarations, solutions, and materials to mediate spatial production and not its underlying structural relationships. Medium Design aligns the concept of medium design with semiotics, objects themselves, and changes the way we describe and proliferate those relationships. Media Design is the spatial production of infrastructural spatial production as well as the underlying relationships that organize for spatial and infrastructural production. We discuss infrastructural spatial production in terms of invisible systems of power and how they can be understood relationally at all scales—global, regional, as well as organizational and personal.

Could you elaborate on your understanding of infrastructure as it relates to design?

CM: Infrastructure is, by its very nature, relational. It exists independently as an artifact but is always defined by that which it connects. For example, a bridge across a river is only accessible if we agree to use the bridge and require us to design the invisible as well as the visible. It differs from other design in that first, our designs are never complete; they always evolve. Second, our designs are indeterminate and disposable. Third, we are not always in control of them. Finally, they are not all future focused. Like a plant with an indeterminate structure, there are no clear boundaries. Our designs will always evolve. Finally, our design is networked and we have to jump scales from settings to systems and back again. Paul Virilio wonderfully describes disaster as “the flywheel of the world,” which bring together urban spatial production and the relationships between unexploited systems of power.

NOTES ON ARCHITECTURE IN THE AGE OF THE ELECTRONOSPHERE — Trent Wimbush

“The Cruelty of Numbers,” architectural theorist Sanford Easterling describes the common classification of modernization into the mechanistic (mechanistic and rudimentary industrial processes) and the “electronic” (pseudo-systemic digital processes) as a means to obscure the restructuring of social space. He critiques contemporary design discourse for its wholesale embrace of the electronic marketplace, where technology-driven spaces are designed to imitate natural processes of metabolism in the service of capital accumulation. The commodity of this strain of design is found in its ethos of a “return to basics” of material intelligence — an ironic stochastic reversal, the pre-existing systemic complexity within the “natural” world restored (as though it ever disappeared?) through an embrace of technology. He views this development as particularly problematic given the demonstrable potential of computational environments to consistently shape a new (electronic) subjectivity (the perfected apocryphal consumer) within an imperfective existential envelope that excludes the possibility of a “back to basics” of the individual.

Felix Guattari characterizes this space more specifically as a “monstrous reinforcement of earlier systems of alienation.” The narrative of late-capitalist development posits through the proliferation of these electronic systems and neo-epimorphic readings of the landscape (that conceal the socio-spatial violences of the truly emergent urban political ecology in which capitalism is but a construct) in favor of a sanitized “closed city of interior sociality.” The notion of “flow” is not considered inherent to the nature of space-time-being, but rather as novel and structural of those patterns that we structure in order to ensure the success of infrastructure. There are design opportunities at each scale. We need to identify those patterns and forces of the global system, but likewise, we need to insert ourselves in the design of the systems that birth those settings.

Does the role of the architect shift to one that is more active towards infrastructure and the so-called “invisible forces” that Keller Easterling speaks about?

CM: Absolutely. We are always seeking patterns and meanings behind those patterns. One of the things that Paisley Parker and I have been working on is how to create a new one. Understanding how we influence and are influenced by those larger systems is key to using and being effective in our roles as designers and operators. As an integral part of the global reproduction of value, we need to perceive, visualize, and represent those forces as outsiders, giving commentary at a distance, nor are we limited to being in the global market as we structure the invisible to be critical of the system itself, even as we help to construct it.

How do you see the translation of these concepts into our studio projects—what does that mean for our economies, our urban (or exurban) experiences? Can we use those concepts in our studio projects—urban planning offices that authorize autonomous vehicles—that whether cars, buses, trucks, trains, or something else entirely—will become the only vehicles on the road. As the number of vehicles on the road continues to grow, we are less likely to be able to govern ourselves. The potential to destabilize linear narratives of technological progress in favor of understanding the social (and perhaps material) relations of their production.

Keller Easterling externalizes such Situational practice by constructing relationships not just with the physical conditions but also to those that are abstract. Rather than thinking of design practice as a medium of communication, she argues that infrastructures, both organizational and material, can be reconceived through the way in which they coordinate the engagement of a diverse network. Such a design practice does not preclude the utilization of technology in the meanest terms but instead requires the reintroduction of a sense that, like that of Keller, can face the constant for vagaries towards the material. While Easterling’s design of infrastructural relations challenges the hegemonic position of the mediation of the digital, it seems to be a redefinition of concept design practice will stand the test of time as the one that was most visible from the future.

The infrastructure of social relations within space, whether virtual or material, continues forward under the prevailing mode of capitalist development. The project here thus remains primarily to deconstruct the notion that technology alone can liberate us from this auto-catalyzing cycle of modernization and its impending crisis. Such pursuit is at its base a design of culture through intervention in the status quo. In solving this problem, we do not need to be anti-design, as this might be seen as the next step, an attempt to take over or become a tool in itself. Rather, such a design practice becomes simultaneously intellectual, political, and economic, and requires the suspension of the rational potential to destabilize disillusioned anticipations about the nature of the Problem.

Notes:


4. Easterling, Helen, Medium Design (Carrington Melton University, 2017).


8. Ibid., 18.


10. Easterling, Helen, Medium Design (Carrington Melton University, 2017).

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IS OUR FUTURE AUTONOMOUS? — Kelly Li

8/22 PM, April 14, 2017—As I stood outside of Giant Eagle with a friend and a bag of groceries, my phone alerted me to the self-driving SuvS delivering the groceries. I saw the SuvS raining the streets with their distinctive spinning LiDARs. When Uber launched its first fleet in 2016, the city welcomed the new technology with open arms, championing Pittsburgh as the new technology hub. But self-driving cars are not just a concern for the techies or the Uber drivers. Autonomous vehicles have much larger implications on our everyday lives. They move us from one place to another and the infrastructures that support that—both physical and digital. What does that mean for our economies, our urban (or exurban) development? How do we prepare for an urban environment that will be self-driving? What does that mean for our personal lives? To deconstruct this argument in relation to the failings of spatial design and development, and our fundamental relationships to work, home, and place? Our “need” for optimization, automation, and efficiency is being anticipated, presented back to us, and capitalized upon. It is essential that we question these practices. Autonomous planning authorities that authorize autonomous vehicles—that whether cars, buses, trucks, trains, or something else entirely—will become the only vehicles on the road. As the number of vehicles on the road continues to grow, we are less likely to be able to govern ourselves. The potential to destabilize linear narratives of technological progress in favor of understanding the social (and perhaps material) relations of their production.

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