



The European Graduate School
EST. 1994

Seminar with Professor Keller Easterling (4.5 ECTS credits)
Division of Philosophy, Art and Critical Thought
October Session/October 17–19 2019

MEDIUM DESIGN

On the flip side of dominant cultural logics, you might take a hard pass on emancipatory manifestos or aspirations to be new, free, radical or right. But maybe there is a very ordinary and practical perspective that has simply been eclipsed—a cultural blind spot that is right before you and a terra incognita where you have already been.

On this flip side, it may be easier to see at a different focal length focusing not only on objects and declarations but the medium of activities and latent potentials in which they are suspended. Not constrained by associations with communications media, medium in this context refers to medius, middle or milieu. Just as medium thinking inverts the typical focus on object and matrix, maybe it can offer some alternative approaches to intractable problems—an expanded repertoire with additional aesthetic pleasures and political capacities to outwit the most cunning superbugs.

Medium cannot really be assessed by a name, shape or outline but rather by what might be called disposition—latent properties that unfold over time and territory, propensities within a context or potentials in relative position. That disposition or agency in arrangement—like an operating system or a growth medium—decides what will live or die.

In this matrix of activity, being right is too weak. It doesn't work against dangerous political superbugs, and it readily conforms to culture's habitual ultimates, closed loops, and binary oppositions. Medium design works instead with time released organs of interplay that become more practical and precise as they become more indeterminate and entangled. These are forms that might inflect populations of objects or set up relative potentials within them.

But this focus on medium leads to other inversions. Medium design does not eliminate, but rather multiplies, problems. Problems have potent potentials that leaven and catalyze each other in interplay. Inverting modernist scripts, medium design favors not new technologies but relationships between technologies. At a moment of digital ubiquity, the heavy lumpy components of space are themselves information systems. A focus on matrix highlights forms of violence and temperament that, without the necessity of discrete

events, remain latent in organizations. So you design things that shouldn't always work within histories things that don't "happen." And in a final inversion, discrepancy tutors a form of dispositional activism that may at once support and run counter to ideological activism.

Medium design draws from many sources—media theorists, analysts of socio-technical networks, political theorists, designers, artists among them—but it leads with some instrumental spatial evidence. Culture may give authority to law and econometrics. But since architecture and urbanism are making radical changes to the globalizing world, space—a broad, inclusive mixing chamber for many social, political, technical networks—may be an underexploited medium of innovation. Speaking to any discipline or treating anyone as a designer, medium design uses space to prompt productive thought about both spatial and non-spatial problems.

Bored with the rhetorical, the seminar meetings foreground design. They consider experiments that leverage heavy situated valued related to, among other things, inequality and climate change in a wetter, hotter world.

DAY ONE

Morning Talk: Introduction: Medium Design and Dispositional Activism

Keller Easterling, *Medium Design* (Strelka Press, 2018).

Afternoon Talk: Activity and Latency

Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), "Knowing How and Knowing That," 25-61.

Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009, reprint from 1966), 1-25.

Michel Foucault, "The Confession of the Flesh," a round table interview from 1977, in *Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

Giorgio Agamben, "What is an Apparatus?" in *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

Gilles Deleuze, "What is Dispositif?" in Timothy Armstrong, trans.ed., *Michel Foucault Philosopher* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

Further Reading: Keller Easterling, "The Histories of things that Don't Happen and Shouldn't Always Work" in Arjun Appadurai and Arien Mack, eds., *Failure*, Special Issue of *Social Research International Quarterly*.

<http://www.e-flux.com/architecture/superhumanity/66720/no-you-re-not/>
Foucault, M. (1991) "Governmentality" in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Burchell, G., Gordon, C. and Miller, P. (eds.), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

DAY TWO

Morning Talk: Indeterminacy and Entanglement

Projects: PiLAR, SoCC

J.J. Gibson, "The Theory of Affordances," in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Houghton Mifflin 1979), Chapter 8.

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A political ecology of things* (Duke University Press, 2010), Chapter 2, *The Agency of Assemblages*

Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 1-24, Introduction: *The Affordances of Form*.

John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (University of Chicago, 2015), *In Media Res and Understanding Media*.

Further Reading: Karan Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke University Press, 2007).

Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (Verso, 2014): *Disposition*.

Afternoon Talk: Heavy Information

Projects: Switch

Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 13-48 special attention to 29-48.

Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2005), 1-17, 43-52.

Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), "Form, Substance and Difference," 448-468 *Culture, Contact and Schismogenesis*,

Isabelle Stengers, *Another Science is Possible: A Manifesto for Slow Science* (Polity Press: 2013, English translation, 2018) Chapter 6: "Cosmopolitics: Civilising Modern Practices."

Keller Easterling, "Switch," e-flux.

Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (Verso, 2018), "Conclusion: The Mobile Commons."

DAY THREE

Morning Talk: Failure

Project: MANY platform, Subtraction protocols

Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (Verso, 2014): Chapter: *Zone*.

Aihwa Ong, *Liberalism as Exception* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), "A Biocartography: Maids, Neoslavery and NGOs," 195-217.

Jacques Rancière, "Democracy Corrected," *On the Shores of Politics* (New York: Verso, 1995), 93-107.

<http://kellereasterling.com/exhibitions/many>

Keller Easterling, *Subtraction*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014).

Further Reading

Vilem Flusser, *The Freedom of the Migrant: Objections to Nationalism* Originally published 1994. Translated reprint 2003.

Easterling, "Parrondo's Paradox: Error in Holy Lands," in *The Next Jerusalem* (2002),

<http://kellereasterling.com/articles/parrando-s-paradox->

Afternoon Talk: Temperament and Discrepancy

Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 6, no. 2, 1969, 167-191.

Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 1-44.

Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), "The Cybernetics of Self: A Theory of Alcoholism," 309-337.

Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2004), 12-45, with particular attention to 12-19.

Keller Easterling, "The One, the Binary, the One-to-One, and the Many," in Marina Otero, et. al., eds., *After Belonging: 2016 Oslo Triennale, 2016, Part I*

Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (Verso, 2014): Chapter: Quality.

Further:

Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (Polity Press, 2018).

Deborah Danowski and Eduardo Viveiros Castro, *The Ends of the Earth* (Polity Press, 2017).