Theorizing Technology in Architecture and Urbanism

Curated by Ute Poerschke and Oliver Schürer
In Aristophanes’ *The Birds*, written approximately 400 years before Vitruvius’ *De architectura libri decem*, the birds decide to escape both from men and the gods and liberate themselves from both the tangible but imperfect everyday, and the ideal but abstract transreality. They found – in the space between earth and heaven – a city in the clouds: cloud-cuckoo-land.

Where is technology at home? Technics, techniques, technologies of design, planning, architecture, building, architectural systems, urban infrastructure, dwelling, and occupation? At first glance, technology belongs to the concrete, everyday realm and relates to processes and artifacts involved in the production, function, and use of architecture. Seen thus, architectural technology seems to possess a »narrow, limited and fragmentary character« (Ernst Cassirer). Adolf Behne insists: »You cannot have both, technics and art«. However, technology is also part of the fundamental sciences and the arts, because technical skills are needed to create both works of art and knowledge. Moreover, the consideration of the technical capacity as intrinsically human (Giordano Bruno) and the presentation of this capacity in art reveal the idealist content of technology. Which discourses have been developing within and against this classical-platonic notion of technology, and how have they influenced architectural concepts?

On the one hand, architectural discourse still follows widely the traditional dichotomy of two distinct knowledge cultures, in which one, the technical-scientific, is secondary to the other, literary-humanistic knowledge (Charles Percy Snow). On the other hand, historians and philosophers of technology seldom discuss architecture as part of their disciplines. This is more surprising, as the philosophy of technology’s most fundamental themes – technology’s relationship to nature, art, and science – are of extraordinary relevance in architecture. Which understandings and relationships between technical and humanistic areas of knowledge can we imagine to utilize for architectural intentions?

How does the relationship between technology and architecture change through dematerialization, digitalization, virtualization and mediatization, and through ephemerization, miniaturization and decentralization? Which role do smart environments, ambient intelligence or locative media play? How do these changes effect aesthetic expression and use?
The issue »Theorizing Technology in Architecture and Urbanism« intends to span the traditional understanding of technics/techniques/technology as the ability to produce architecture, and the newer understanding of technology as building-integrated artefacts and processes, which allow for the functioning and performing of architecture. The journal Wolkenkuckucksheim | Cloud-Cuckoo-Land | Воздушный замок invites critics, practitioners and theorists – beyond the boundaries of languages, cultures, and disciplines – to join a broad discourse on the relationship of technology and architecture. Contributions should not solely focus on the description of technological artefacts, processes or functionality, but emphasize the discussion of their cultural context, conceptual dimensions, aesthetic relevance, and experiential value (object-user-relation).

Three thematic areas are intended. The first area ›Discourses and Fields‹ focuses on theoretical, historical, and philosophical approaches. The second area ›Authors and Schools‹ discusses specific concepts of technics and technology in architecture. In the third area ›Projects and Utopias‹ interpretations of technology will be discussed through built and designed examples. The suggestions at the end of this call for paper are intended to inspire – not limit – paper submissions.

Suggestions for articles
(considered to inspire, not limit, ideas for papers)

A. Discourses and Fields
- The terms techné – poiesis – autopoiesis – praxis
- Differentiating the Terms Technique, Technics and Technology for Architectural Intentions
- Semiotics – Signs / Symbols – Metaphors of Technical Systems in Architecture
- Technology-User-Relationships in Architecture
- Critique of Technology in Architectural Discourse
- Architectural History as Technological History
- Technology as Ornament, Engineering-Aesthetics
- Architecture as Producing and Representing Innovation
- Aesthetics of the Performative: Movement of Air, Sound, Heat, Humidity, Electricity
- Media-Architecture and Information-Aesthetics
- Critiquing new Tools, such as 3D Print, Building-Robotics, Fabrication, Modeling or Parametric Design
B. Authors and Schools
– Gottfried Semper: Textile Art, Ceramics, Tectonics, and Stereotomy as Primal Architectural Techniques
– Peter Behrens: Art and Technics
– Ernst Cassirer: Form and Technology
– Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm (1953–1968)
– Konrad Wachsmann: Seven Theses/ Turning Point of Building
– From Banham to Böhme or from Well-Tempered Environments to Atmospheres
– High-Tech, Low-Tech, Eco-Tech
– Bernard Cache: Digital Semper 2000

C. Projects and Utopias
– 1857 Charles Barry: Reform Club
– 1908 Villa Féria Electra
– 1926 Frankfurt Kitchen
– 1965 Reyner Banham & François Dallegret: Environmental Bubble
– 1989 Ken Sakamura: TRON Smart House, Tokyo
– 1996 Oosterhuis & NOX: Saltwater and Sweetwater Pavilions
– 2000 Werner Sobek: R128
– 2002 Diller & Skofidio: Blur Building
– Ecologic Studio, Adaptive Building Initiative, Terrefuge und WHITEviod