

Call for papers

Thinking and Making Connections:

Cybernetic Heritage in the Social and Human Sciences and Beyond

Södertörn University College
in cooperation with The Nobel Museum
invites you to an international conference on 10 – 11 November, 2008

Place: **The Nobel Museum & Södertörn University College**, Stockholm, Sweden.

Confirmed keynote speakers:

Slava Gerovitch, lecturer in the history of science, MIT, USA:
“Cybernetic Translations: The Allure and the Menace of Cyberspeak”

Jasia Reichardt, writer on art, London, the UK: *“The Early Days of Intermedia”*

Joanna Zylińska, senior lecturer in New Media and Communications, Goldsmiths, University of London, the UK: *“Is There Life in Cybernetics?: Designing a Post-humanist Bioethics”*

Scientific committee

Prof Teresa Kulawik
Egle Rindzeviciute
Ass. Prof Rebecka Lettevall
Prof Göran Bolin



Norbert Wiener's cybernetics, a theory of control via feedback, emerged from technological developments during World War II and was crucially important for a wide range of sciences which arguably defined societies, cultures and politics in the second half of the twentieth century. Concepts of cybernetic control were distributed throughout such fields as genetics and neurology, computer sciences and telecommunications, but also organisational sciences, semiotics, political sciences and sociology. Moreover, the influence of cybernetics was global, spanning different political regimes as it developed both in liberal democracies and authoritarian state-socialist countries.

Since the 1950s the scientific, political, social and cultural legacies of cybernetics in the East and West have been increasingly addressed across different academic disciplines. At its early stage the post-industrialisation of societies was often identified with the spread of cybernetic technologies, particularly information and automation. The third or post-industrial revolution, famously conceptualised by Daniel A. Bell, Jon Kenneth Galbraith and Peter Drucker, was also called the "cybernetic revolution".

As the history of cybernetics has been evolving for more than half a century, it is time to look back and re-assess its role, meaning and influence. What is the state of the art in the field of "cybernetic studies" across a variety of disciplines? The conference aims to bring together the leading scholars in the field, as well to give an opportunity to young researchers to present their findings. We invite the participation of scholars working in areas including, but not limited to, the history of science and technology and science and technology studies (STS), history of art and literary studies, media and cultural policy studies, political sciences and sociology.

The ideas developed in cybernetics and systems theory have influenced methods in social sciences, humanities and the arts. How can the history and impact of cybernetics be approached in the light of new theoretical and methodological developments? Equally, what lessons can be drawn about contemporary states, societies and sciences if one scrutinises the more recent impact of natural sciences on social sciences and humanities?

The context of the Cold War was important in the evolution of cybernetics. The power of science and technology to make and break conceptual and material connections – political, social and cultural – was especially salient in the cybernetic case as it originated in, and was used in, the military sector. As a part of an anti-Western campaign, cybernetics was banned in the Soviet Union in the early 1950s, but about 25 years later it was rehabilitated and mobilised to signify the cooperation between the opposing regimes, communist and capitalist. As noted by Philip Mirowski, the 1975 Nobel Prize was jointly awarded to the American and Soviet economists, Tjalling Koopmans and Leonid Kantorovich. The prize was thus an avowal of both the civic use of cybernetics and its capacity to transform governance in different political systems. How can the recent history of sciences and technologies be used to understand the processes of global political ordering? How could "cybernetic studies" benefit studies of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern enlargement of the European Union?

Finally, we invite participants to address the influence of cybernetics in contemporary cultures and societies. How are cybernetic principles reflexively used in cultural production, especially new media, contemporary arts, literature and museums? How can we conceptualise cybernetics' contribution towards forming entire new platforms for cultural practices, such as the internet?

Papers focusing on the international dimension, the analysis and comparison of European, Soviet and post-Soviet transformations in Eastern Europe and the Baltic Sea Area are particularly encouraged.



Practical matters

The deadline for submission of proposals for a paper is Saturday, 30 August 2008.

The selected participants will be notified on 15 September 2008.

There is no special registration form. Paper and panel proposals (not longer than 500 words) are to be sent electronically to this email address: cyber2008@sh.se

- Please note that an individual presentation should be no more than 20 mins with an additional 10 mins allocated for questions and discussion.
- A panel session should include no more than 3 speakers.
- The conference language is English.
- Thanks to the generous support of the Foundation for Baltic & East European Studies (Ostersjöstiftelsen), Centre for Baltic and East European Studies (CBEES) and The Nobel Museum, there is no participation fee, but participants are encouraged to **register no later than Friday, 10 October 2008.**
- The conference participants are encouraged to take care themselves of their travel and accommodation in Stockholm.
- Coffee breaks, reception and dinner will be provided by the conference organisers for accepted and registered speakers.

For more information, contact the scientific co-ordinator, Ms Egle Rindzeviciute at egle.rindzeviciute@sh.se.

