



ISM SEMINAR

Autumn Term 2013

Speaker: Professor Jannis Kallinikos (London School of Economics)
Title: Information Artefacts and Social Practice: Crossing the Border of Materiality
Date: Thursday 07 November 2013
Venue: B3.09, WBS Scarman Road
Time: 14.00

Abstract: Technological objects or systems combine *function*, *form* and *matter* in varying proportions. Every technological object or system epitomizes a purpose or function (e.g. a knife cuts or pierces, a vessel contains, a screen displays) that is variously supported by the materials the object/system is made of, and the ways these materials have been given specific form to assist that function. A knife is sharp, a vessel concave, a display flat. Technological evolution betrays a trajectory that attests to the prevailing role function has assumed in the design and making of technological systems and artefacts. I read these developments as implying the progressive dematerialization of technological processes and objects and the increasing unbundling of functional attributes from their underlying material constitution. Once perhaps a derivative of material attributes (wood, clay or stone), function currently provides the primary matrix out of which technological objects and processes emerge. These developments reach its culmination in contemporary software technology that is essentially more logic (pre-programmed logical instructions) than *techne* (a practical skill), and the consequent and expanding domestication of computer hardware (virtualization) and other physical objects by software.

These ideas have important implications for the ways we understand information or software-based artefacts and the ways they are involved in social practice. For, they show that the understanding of technological artefacts as assemblies of technical and social (or social and material) attributes or components do not do justice to their nature. They also incite us to rethink the ways through which the development and social embedment of functions over large time spans is implicated in the making of skills and modes of conduct (that is, agency). Agency and technology are not exogenous to one another as ordinary accounts of technology use as a local affair suggest. They implicate one another as the outcome of long lasting processes of mutual adjustments and co-evolution.

Biography: Over the last 3-5 years, Professor Kallinikos' research interests have increasingly focused on information growth. He and his collaborators are currently engaged in a research project that seeks to account for the formation of large infospaces. The research also tracks the organisational implications of changing infrastructural conditions of production and administration brought about by the deepening penetration of organisations by information.

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