

Laudatio Schellingpreis Architekturtheorie

14 November 2018

Prof. Dr. Georg Vrachliotis

Dear guests and colleagues, dear friends and students,

Dear Keller Easterling,

Today, political structures and social modes of existence are emerging which can no longer be explained without computational infrastructures, platforms, and ubiquitous computing. Following the cybernetics wave in the second half of the last century, we are now witnessing how once big, bulky computing machines are steadily losing weight, but gaining all the more in power. Their sensors have emigrated to populate our environment, creating their own algorithmic ecosystems and powerful infrastructures. And while smart dust blows like a warm technological wind through buildings, cities, and landscapes, our behavior, communication, experiences, and emotions are being stored, analyzed, and evaluated as quantifiable patterns. The random noise of data is all around us, yet so far, we can neither experience it nor grasp it directly. In the world of software, space dissolves into a description of space; time into a description of time; and the body into a description of the body. But datafication and virtualization do not result in a story of loss. Because that which dematerializes becomes manifest somewhere else.

Computers are not only a passive medium for symbols, but active creators – symbols generating more symbols. And computer codes, as implemented theories of symbols, enter into a powerful connection with the machines.

What is transferred to thousands of computers, what is copied and becomes part of our everyday world through constant repetition, stabilizes itself and becomes an infrastructural sediment of the global capitalist system.

But we must ask: Who designs these infrastructural spaces? How is their architectural, internal logic structured? What is their political power? And where can places for social criticism, political thinking, and intellectual vigor develop within this infrastructure?

No one has dealt more intensively with these questions, no one has fathomed so astutely the theoretical potential of these complex relationships, no one has delivered such brilliant and stimulating analyses – as Keller Easterling. She has succeeded in making the question of the agency of infrastructures an intellectual task for both theory and practice. With her countless essays and books – I am thinking in particular of her books *Extrastatecraft, the Power of Infrastructure Space* and (her recently published) *Medium Design* – she has managed to open a door and critically examine the operating system of the global complex of capital and technology.

Her timing could not be better, as we observe a trend towards narrow-minded, anti-intellectual politics, in which the creative power threatens to be devoured by sheer populism.

Keller Easterling's works not only testify to her theoretical acumen, but also manifest an enormous, brilliant force that can bring to life compelling and provocative discussions about architecture and society.

Her observations are sophisticated, her descriptions precise and powerful. Instead of giving us insight *by means of* technology, she gives us insight *into* technology. And she does so by bringing infrastructures in architecture to life through her narratives, again and again, within a historical and theoretical framework. Storytelling becomes a strategy of political appropriation of space – and thus a subtle yet powerful form of critical thinking.

Dear Keller Easterling, the Jury of the Schelling Foundation is delighted – and proud – to present you this year’s Schelling Prize for Architectural Theory.

Congratulations!