

## Designing Geopolitics (Basel, 20 Jan 18)

Basel, Jan 20, 2018

Deadline: Nov 20, 2017

Kenny Cupers, University of Basel

Workshop, History and Theory of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Basel

Geopolitics has emerged as a key term to understand the global dimension of architecture, urbanism, and design in the twentieth century. In recent architectural and urban histories, however, geopolitics tends to mean little more than international relations, and the concept's own historical trajectory—the subject of current scholarship in historical geography—remains largely unacknowledged.

Geopolitics was conceived at the turn of the twentieth century as a way to study the political effects of geography. Even though it was rooted in ancient theories of climatic determinism, the new discipline was propelled by the effects of industrialization and undergirded by social Darwinism and biological theories of the modern state. Geopolitical thinkers such as Friedrich Ratzel or Halford Mackinder did not limit geography to soil, climate, or other qualities of the Earth itself; they also considered the ways in which agriculture, industry, resource extraction, military power, and the new technological possibilities of transportation and communication influenced the international system of states and their territorial configuration. In short, geopolitics was not just determined by physical geography, it was also a matter of design. With the rise of technological modernism and economic planning in the interwar period, geopolitics and design became ever more closely related. Telecommunications, ports, roads, and other public works—now understood as part of a new rubric called “infrastructure”—were recognized as central to the development of nations. Even though the discipline itself lost its legitimacy after WWII, geopolitical thinking continued to shape sovereignty and subjectivity in the contexts of the Cold War and of decolonization. Dams, highways, and houses became the unquestioned material basis of post-independence nation-building and development.

This workshop brings together scholars of architectural and design history, historical geography, and science and technology studies to explore the nexus of geopolitics and design from the late nineteenth century to the present. Our aim is to study geopolitics beyond the bounds of nationalist propaganda, to include the various ways in which design thinking has shaped political geography and how geopolitical concepts and frameworks were integrated in the disciplines of architecture, urbanism, and design. How can technological systems, whether applied to the modernization of agriculture or the governance of cities, be understood as designed interventions in political geography? Rather than thinking of such systems and designs as invented in the North and exported to the South, or as laid over a pre-existing geography, we are interested in how the designs and geographies of globalization are co-produced. How has infrastructure building shaped the histori-

cal relationship between global North and global South? How have applications of systems theory reshaped national sovereignty and international relations? How do the geopolitics and ideological dimensions of infrastructure impact the construction of political subjectivity? What modes of being and seeing do such theoretical and material constructions produce?

Please submit an abstract of no more than 300 words and a C.V. by 20 November 2017 to the organizer, Kenny Cupers (kenny.cupers@unibas.ch). Applicants will be notified by 1 December. This workshop builds on two previous workshops of the History and Theory of Architecture and Urbanism research group at the University of Basel: "Territoriality" (December 2015) and "Grounding Biopower: Inventions of Land and Landscape" (June 2017).

Reference:

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