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Born in 1957 in Augsburg

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PROJECT

The Material Mind: a Social History of the Prototype

The Material Mind: A Social History of the Prototype is a manuscript written to support anthropological research on the design of "smart" fabrics. The manuscript will consider the impact of wireless communication technology on one of the main tenets of the Enlightenment, the theory of mind, with its associated nexus of models relating to memory, culture and technology. The year at the Wissenschaftskolleg will enable me to conduct library research relating to the historical and generic part of the manuscript dealing with the social history of the prototype and to draft chapters on visualization and mathematical calculation, material technology and the modeling of mind, and the role of the material in creativity and innovation. To retain the link with my research on what is known colloquially as "I-wear", I shall investigate the hypothesis that a thread-based model of information-processing presents us with an epistemological challenge to established models of mind that take as their starting point material media of an altogether different kind.

Recommended Reading

Küchler, Susanne. *Malanggan: Art, Memory and Sacrifice*. Oxford: Berg, 2002.

Küchler, Susanne, Graeme Were, photography by Glenn Jowitt, eds. *Pacific Pattern*. London: Thames & Hudson. To be published in September 2005.

COLLOQUIUM, 07.03.2006

Mind, Materiality and Society

Despite the many and increasingly rapid developments in communication technology - dramatically transforming the way we relate to each other, to our work, and to our life in general - our perception of materials around us has remained strikingly unaffected. While products that process information have become smaller and more portable over the last few years, in step with the development of microchips and switches, we still tend to assume that the material is the mere covering of such a product, and that it has, by and large, nothing to do with the product's function.

My project this year started with the simple question as to why this should be the case - would it really be correct to assume that in the information age we can have an explosion of optical information without materiality playing a role in partaking in drawing things together? What started as a curiosity turned out to be an avalanche of expert knowledge and a technical revolution that is well under way in creating a world where huge ad hoc networks are formed from materials that are capable of sensing, processing, and acting upon information about their surroundings, and are able to exchange this information with their closest neighbors. While the notion of an

ambient, material intelligence, spreading across generalized and transformative surfaces, is exciting in itself, the realization that such surfaces are generally made from fiber has prompted me to undertake a survey which charts the theoretical and methodological implications of "smart fabrics" for social science.

I have come to this material from the vantage point of Pacific Anthropology, which has struggled for some time to revise the theory of social relations in light of a notion of materiality that make sense of the workings of a knowledge economy. Against the background of such a theoretical inquiry, my book, 'The Material Mind,' sets out to appraise the materiality of smart fabrics that move us to consider the social effect of thoughts that are no less physical than objects and thinking that is no less physical than acting. It may be shocking to some that I dare link the low-tech world of the Pacific with the high-tech laboratories of Euro-America, moving in an inverse direction to conventional ethnography, but I for one have been shocked to find surprising affinities between "this" and "that" material, thus compelling me to investigate what emerges from laboratories far more closely than I had initially intended.

In my talk I will summarize the main tenets of a fibrous world that has been made in the laboratory, a world in which moving lots of information fast - not just between people but between things - is of paramount importance. This is a world that is mobile, cumulative, immediate and ever attentive, a world where the material products of engineering are inseparable from the amplification of cognitive technologies - a world where drawing inferences or inventing new solutions to technical problems calls on spatial modes of conceptualization. What I will give you is a condensed version of two chapters that hint at the content of further ones, and will hopefully invite your comments on the material.

PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

Küchler, Susanne (2007)

The string in art and science : rediscovering the material mind

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1665032367>

Küchler, Susanne (Quebec,2006)

Des matières qui travaillent : une leçon pour l'anthropologie ; note de recherche

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1665036524>

Küchler, Susanne (2005)

The modality of time-maps : quilting in the Pacific from another point of view

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=770112196>

Küchler, Susanne (2005)

Why are there Quilts in Polynesia?

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=497719002>

Küchler, Susanne (London,2005)

Pacific pattern

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=49166270X>

Küchler, Susanne (Oxford, UK [u.a.],2005)

Clothing as material culture

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=476309271>

Küchler, Susanne (London [u.a.],2005)

The art of clothing : a Pacific experience

<https://kxp.k10plus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=470987502>

Küchler, Susanne (2003)

Rethinking textile : the advent of the "smart" fiber surface

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=794267351>

Küchler, Susanne (Oxford [u.a.],2002)

Malanggan : art, memory and sacrifice

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=354066234>

Materializing culture

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=354066234>

Küchler, Susanne (2001)

The place of memory

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=352628758>