Science Studies Colloquium Series

Presents:

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4:00pm - 5:30pm
Humanities and Social Sciences Bldg. (HSS)
Science Studies Conf. Room 3027
UC San Diego

Computing Power: The Transnational Politics of Digital Technology in North Korea

Discussions of digital technology in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) are generally limited to the topics of cyberwarfare or the state's attempts to control Internet access and digital media flows. In the first case, technology is framed within a process of securitization which constructs the DPRK as a threat. In the second one, techno-optimism and regime change rhetoric converge in a depiction of the socialist state as a relic of the past soon to be toppled by a wave of digital modernity unfurling from the "free world". This talk offers to question the assumptions and the Cold War Manicheism informing these perspectives, and to historicize the development of digital technology in the DPRK in order to assess its economic, political and cultural impact.

The first part of the talk maps the transnational networks in which early North Korean computer science was embedded. Highlighting the complex assemblage of intra-bloc conflicts, technology transfer regulations, competing business interests, and developmental nationalism that shaped North Korean computing, it questions the methodological value of concepts such as importation, innovation and adaptation for the history of technology in the global periphery.

The second part of the talk focuses on the interaction between state ideology and digital technology, from the relationship between computers and economic planning to the recent confluence between capitalistic entrepreneurial discourse and the national ideology of self-reliance (Juche) in the government's support of technology ventures.

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