CSLS SPEAKER SERIES
THURSDAY, February 26, 2015
NOTE: 12:30-1:45p in the Warren Room, 295 Simon Hall
Lunch will be served starting at 12 noon

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“The Expository Society: Spectacle, Surveillance, and Exhibition in the Digital Age”

In 1827, Nicolaus Heinrich Julius, a professor at the University of Berlin, identified an important architectural mutation in nineteenth-century society that reflected a deep disruption in our technologies of knowledge and a profound transformation in relations of power across society: Antiquity, Julius observed, had discovered the architectural form of the spectacle; but modern times had operated a fundamental shift from spectacle to surveillance. Michel Foucault would elaborate this insight in his 1973 Collège de France lectures on The Punitive Society, where he would declare: “[T]his is precisely what happens in the modern era: the reversal of the spectacle into surveillance…. We have here a completely different structure where men who are placed next to each other on a flat surface will be surveilled from above by someone who sees with a universal eye.”

What should we make of those archetypes today? Do they help us better understand our neoliberal digital condition of data collection, mining, and profiling by corporate giants such as Google and Facebook, and the NSA? With neoliberalism and digitization — in the age of digital security — I suggest, we have gone beyond both spectacle and surveillance to a new form: one that is captured best by the idea of exposition or exhibition. Guy Debord spoke of “the society of the spectacle,” Foucault drew our attention instead to “the punitive society,” but it seems as if, today, we live in the expository society. This essay offers an architectural schema to better understand our contemporary distributions of power, one that focuses on the themed space of consumption. It then actualizes the metaphor by exploring one particular manifestation of a fully-digitized themed space, and asks how we have come to embrace and love these new forms of exhibition today.

Copies of Professor Harcourt’s paper are available at SSRN http://ssrn.com/abstract=2455223, on the CSLS website http://www.law.berkeley.edu/1108.htm and in print copy in the Center Library.

Jonathan Simon, Director