New Course Offering Fall 2008

A Cybernetic Control Room
(Santiago, Chile 1973)

INFO 690: Cybernetics and Revolution: International Histories of Science, Technology and Political Change

Professor Eden Medina
W 1-3:30pm
Maximum enrollment 10

Norbert Wiener used the term cybernetics for studies of communication and control in the animal and the machine. Cybernetics brought together ideas from biology, psychology, math, computation, and engineering and looked for underlying commonalities in areas as diverse as neurology, electronics, and the study of social systems. Historical studies of cybernetics often cite the research activity that took place in the United States during 1940s and 1950s as the peak moment of this interdisciplinary field. However, these ideas also took root in other parts of the world, where they intertwined with other national histories and political ideologies. This class will bring an international perspective to the study of cybernetics. Different geographical, political, and cultural contexts shaped the language, content, and application of cybernetic science outside of the United States. Cybernetics also offered new ways for imagining social and political change. The class will study individuals such as Norbert Wiener, Ross Ashby, Stafford Beer, Humberto Maturana, Viktor Glushkov, and Fernando Flores, among others. Since most histories of cybernetics are set in the United States and Western Europe, special attention will be given to the evolution and application of cybernetic ideas in Latin America.