In this chapter, Boyer argues that cybernetics, systems theory, computer programming - in short, the information mechanisms implementing “societies of control”, have everything to do with time, as well as space, as Foucault outlined. Time is involved in a signal relayed, a message sent out from one post to another where it is received, decoded, interpreted. The arrow of time is always involved in control theories of communication – there is noise in the transmission, elements received and elements not received. Furthermore, in a cybernetic control system, learning is a matter of feeding back information from the environment to the system in order to regulate its dysfunction, or entropy; i.e., disorganization or chaotic behavior of the system. Both feedback and entropy deal with the arrow of time – one reflexive and corrective, the other disintegrative, a matter of slowing down and disorganizing matter. Precisely these imagined connections between art and time, architecture and communication that worried theorists in the 1950’s and 1960’s, for might these shifts towards an information control mean that the object of architecture was dematerializing before their eyes? Boyer examines several contemporary thinkers in order to draw an analogy with chrono-topologies, or a complex of different spaces and separate times.

“Societies of Control”, as Michel Foucault described them, belong to the modern space of emplacement.¹ We do not live in a spatial void in which things and individuals can be placed, but instead we reside inside an ensemble of relations that define emplacement. Foucault formally depicted such ensembles of control as relations between points in a network, elements in a series, and nodes on a tree - all icons of information processing deployed in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Foucault used for an example of a network, the storage of information in the memory of a computer; for a series, he deployed the circulation of discrete elements with random outputs such as automobiles on a highway; and for a tree, he examined the coded elements of an archival structure assembled according to various categorization, classification and distribution schemes. All these icons were ensembles of control, controlling how knowledge was gathered, shaped and disseminated. Highways or computers, for example, did not confine people in places - but they did multiply means of control. One could travel freely about on a roadway while being perfectly controlled by speed limits and police surveillance; one could generate information from within highly controlled access points such as libraries or museums.

Gilles Deleuze, as the major interpreter of Foucault’s “Societies of Control”, maintained these societies were distinct from, yet overlapped with,

the closed “Disciplinary Societies” Foucault’s work normally deciphered. The latter deployed their grid of power/knowledge via places of confinement in prisons, schools, or hospitals. To the contrary, “Societies of Control” no longer relied on disciplinary procedures; they had no need to confine bodies in place, but opened onto continuous flows of information, bodies, and objects.

Foucault took the label “Societies of Control” from William Burroughs whom he admired, or so Deleuze reported. Burroughs was obsessed in the 1950’s with how language, education, and conceptual structures conditioned beliefs, determined reality, created a type of thought-control more pernicious than disciplinary laws and regulations. Foucault agreed with Burroughs that the future would be more controlled than disciplined. The future would produce new visibilities, new utterances, new power relations, new forms of subjectivity requiring new forms of resistance. Eventually, “Societies of Control” would engender new discursive and imaginary regimes of information.

What does this shift from “Disciplinary Societies” to “Societies of Control” mean for architecture, and even more pertinent what does it mean for architectural historians? And what does this have to do with chronotopologies? This paper will argue that cybernetics, systems theory, computer programming, in short the information mechanisms implementing “Societies of Control”, have everything to do with time, as well as space, as Foucault outlined. Time is involved in a signal relayed, a message sent out from one post to another where it is received, decoded, interpreted. The arrow of time is always involved in control theories of communication – there is noise in the transmission, causing some elements to be received other elements lost or garbled. Furthermore, in a cybernetic control system, learning is a matter of feeding back information from the environment to the system in order to regulate its dysfunction, or entropy (i.e., disorganization or chaotic behavior of the system). Both feedback and entropy deal with the arrow of time – one reflexive and corrective, the other disintegrative, a matter of slowing down and disorganizing matter. How then are messages transmitted over time, how might information be packaged more effectively so it reached its goal, how might new communication media be deployed to enhance spectator learning or reception, how might behavior be controlled in new and different manner? It is these and many other imagined connections between art and the flow of time, architecture and the transmission of information control and freedom, that both worried and excited artists and historians in the 1950’s and 1960’s.

4 Deleuze, Gilles, “What is a Dispositif? ” in Two Regimes of Madness, op cit, pp. 349-348.