

Media Archaeology (E58.2134)
Mondays 2 - 4:10 pm, Spring 2010
Tisch Hall, LC15
Prof. Alexander R. Galloway

Overview

Over the last decade or so, scholars in several disciplines have embarked on a series of media-archaeological excavations, sifting through the layers of early and obsolete practices and technologies of communication. The archaeological metaphor evokes both the desire to recover material traces of the past and the imperative to situate those traces in their social, cultural, and political contexts--while always watching our steps. This graduate seminar will examine some of the most important contributions to the field of media archaeology.

The course follows a research studio format in which students undertake archaeological projects of their own in the area of forgotten, obsolete, or otherwise “dead” media technologies. This might include papyrus, Athanasius Kircher’s seventeenth-century magic lantern, or the common slide projector, discontinued by Kodak in 2004. Our goal is to introduce students to the skills and resources necessary for producing rigorous research on such obsolete and obscure media. It will include an exposure to scholarship in media archaeology; an intensive introduction to research methods; instruction on the localization and utilization of word, image, and sound archives; and an emphasis on restoring media artifacts to their proper social and cultural context. The course stems from the premise that media archaeology is best undertaken, like any archaeological project, collaboratively. Hence the course follows a research studio model commonly used in disciplines such as architecture or design.

Class Format

The central focus of this course will be the excavation of textual, visual, and sonic materials and their arrangement into a series of “dead media” dossiers on specific topics. Students will be required to work in small groups as well as individually. Each dossier is pursued over a two-week period. Upon completion of one topic a new topic is selected and the cycle repeats itself. The dossiers are published online using Wiki software.

Classroom time consists of student groups presenting their research findings for the week, followed by criticism and feedback from the instructors and other students. Since the weekly course requirements are relatively demanding, the course does not have any additional exams or papers. Over the course of the semester a collection of research dossiers will accumulate based on the students’ work. These will remain online as public documents, accessible both to other students as well as the general public.

January 25--Course Introduction

February 1--Media Archeology

Artifacts: chirograph, Zuse palimpsest.

Reading: Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

February 8--Matter, Design, Form, Things/Objects, or “Why Do Typewriters Go ‘Click’”

Artifacts: thing, typewriter, stenotype.

Reading: Vilém Flusser, *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design* (London: Reaktion, 1999).

February 22--Files and Archives

Artifacts: mystic writing pad, file, folder.

Reading: Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

March 1--Vision, Optical Toys, Proto-cinema

Artifacts: camera obscura, camera lucida, magic lantern, stereoscope.

Reading: Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

March 8--First Student Crit

March 22--Writing, Inscription, Sound, Analog Seriality

Artifacts: piano roll, wax cylinder, gramophone.

Reading: Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

March 29--Second Student Crit

April 5--Moving Image, Digital Seriality

Artifact: chronophotograph.

Reading: Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

April 12--Third Student Crit

April 19--Black Boxes, Information, Computers

Artifacts: punch card, Palpable Arithmetic, laptop.

Reading: Eva Horn, “Knowing the Enemy: The Epistemology of Secret Intelligence,” *Grey Room* 11 (Spring 2003): 58-85; Herta Wolf, “The Tears of Photography,” *Grey Room* 29 (Fall 2007): 66-89; Cornelia Vismann and Markus Krajewski, “Computer

Juridisms,” *Grey Room* 29 (Fall 2007): 90–109.

April 26--Fourth Student Crit

May 3--Course conclusion

Required Books (Available at the NYU bookstore and on reserve at Bobst library):

Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

Vilém Flusser, *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design* (London: Reaktion, 1999).

Lisa Gitelman, *Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

Additional Suggested Readings and Resources:

ADILKNO, *Media Archive* (New York: Autonomedia, 1998).

Giorgio Agamben, “What Is an Apparatus?,” *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” *What is Cinema? Vol. 1.* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).

Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (New York: Verso, 2002).

Lorraine Daston, ed., *Things That Talk: Object Lessons from Art and Science* (New York:

Zone Books, 2004).

Gilles Deleuze, "What Is a Dispositif?" in *Michel Foucault, Philosopher*, ed. Timothy Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Sigmund Freud, "A Note upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad,'" *General Psychological Theory, Chapter XIII* (1925).

Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree, Eds. *New Media, 1740-1915* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003).

Friedrich Kittler, "The History of Communication Media," <http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=45>.

Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

Barbara Stafford and Frances Terpak, *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty, 2001).

Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Requirements

- All students are required to attend class and complete all assigned reading
- Dead media dossiers
 - Four different dossiers on a specific piece of dead media are required. Two dossiers will be drafted collaboratively in small student groups; two will be solo. Each dossier will be presented orally to the class and will receive criticism from the instructors and from other students. Each dossier must be approximately 1000 words in length for solo dossiers or 3000 words in length for group dossiers and must be historical and/or critical in nature. Dossiers may include textual, sonic, or visual material. Each dossier must be authored in Wiki software, and therefore will be subject to public viewing and possible revision.

Grade Formula

- Dead media dossier #1: %20
- Dead media dossier #2: %20
- Dead media dossier #3: %20
- Dead media dossier #4: %20
- Class participation: %20

Grading Rubric

A — Excellent. Student exhibits exemplary creativity through historical research and critical analysis. Research and writing is lucid and engaging with zero mistakes.

B — Good. References to the course material are well-selected and topical. Critical analysis is present, but largely rehearsed from class lecture and discussion. Student's style is clear and has very few mistakes.

C — Satisfactory. References to the course material are well-selected and topical, but student performs little or no historical or critical analysis. Problems exist in student's work. Work consists mostly of underdeveloped ideas, off-topic sources or examples, inappropriate research, or anecdotes.

D — Unsatisfactory. Student does not engage with the material and no historical or critical analysis is present. Substantial problems exist in student's work.

F — Fail. Student does not submit work, or work is below unsatisfactory level.