Media Archaeology Lab Project Briefs

Working in groups of two or three students, you will choose to undertake one of the three projects at the Media Archaeology Lab. Each project has been designed to merge practical skills with critical thinking, and to gain confidence in experimenting with different media through processes of trial and error. The collaborative nature of this exercise reflects the belief that there is value in shared exploration, construction, conversation, and reflection.

Your group will turn in a two-page paper that responds to your project brief. Papers will be graded for the interest, thoroughness, and clarity of their ideas. These exercises are aimed at making quality identifications; including a thesis or a group of overarching claims is not necessary (but is certainly welcome!). One hour may be enough time to experiment with media and record ideas for your short paper, but you will likely wish to return to the MAL during open hours to continue your explorations.

Note that you do not have to address all of the questions in the second part of each project brief; they are designed to spark ideas and encourage a range of thought processes as you experiment in the MAL.

Digital Literature
Undertake a close analysis of a literary work in the MAL

Choose a piece of digital literature from the MAL's bookshelf in the opening room, or a narrative-driven video game from the back room. Close read this work, paying attention to experimental aesthetic and material form. You might consider:

What are the similarities and differences in this narrative compared to print literature? What types of traditional, "scholarly" skills have you drawn on to reach these conclusions e.g. what modes of textual analysis have you employed in your close reading? Does this digital narrative include moments of discursive or material self-reflexivity? How do notions of embodiment figure into your reading? Can you explore the work in manner that was likely not intended by the author upon creation? At the societal level, has digital media replaced print media? More specifically, does this cultural shift in narrative form destabilize the traditional literary novel? Does digital literature challenge normative humanities' practices, and how has it been received in your own department?

Medial Affordances
Interrogate the numerous attributes of a specific piece of media in the MAL

Explore the many affordances offered by a specific piece of technology in the MAL. You can approach your analysis through different modes of knowing as t(h)inkerers who experiment with and discuss materiality and digital space. You might consider:

What are the expected uses of the piece you are examining? What type of audience is it aimed at? Can you discover other affordances whereby the object could be repurposed for artistic, scholarly, or entertainment needs? Can you attribute a particular type of agency to the machine? Can you identify disparities in technopower (the control and access to information via the digital) that this inscription technology reinforces or resists? What type of recursions and non-linear relationships can you draw between this dated machine and contemporary media? How is your object situated in terms of Lab infrastructure, and what does this suggest? What type of scholarly disciplines might be interested in the conclusions you have reached?

Maker Culture + Forensic Materiality
Repair or build a piece of technology in the MAL

Embodying the role of artist-archaeologist to meld critical analysis with maker culture, repair a broken piece of technology or build a new medial object from obsolete parts housed at the Lab. Record your repairs/construction in a video, and upload this video to your class blog (it may also be featured on the MAL website). You might consider:

How has your group decided what type of repair or construction project to undertake? What types of elements from maker culture are you employing? Is absolute fidelity to the original design or intended purpose necessary and/or important? What obstacles have you run into when attempting repairs or fabrication? How does this type of practical "doing" compare to other methods of scholarship such as close reading and distant reading? Does your reuse of obsolete electronic materials suggest ideas about the sustainability of the tech industry, in both local and global terms? Has reconstructing technology at the physical component level led to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between society and technology when compared to a merely theoretical project? How might the online video be useful to people who cannot access the physical Lab space?