

**CS610: Media Archaeology**  
**Winter 2008**  
**Mondays 9:30–12:20 pm**  
**P3027**

**Instructor: Dr. Darren Wershler-Henry**

3-142 Dr. Alvin Woods Building

519-884-1970 ex. 2798

[dwershlerhenry@wlu.ca](mailto:dwershlerhenry@wlu.ca)

[alienated.net/dwh](http://alienated.net/dwh)

Office hours: Mondays 12:30 pm–2:20 pm or by appointment

### **Description**

In the words of Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree, all media, from clay tokens and quipus to email and instant messages, were once new media. This course focuses on traces of these moments in the historical archive, moments before the material means and conceptual modes of new media have become fixed, when such media are not yet accepted as natural, when their own meanings are in flux. Beginning with the tools that shape, store, and transmit our own ideas, such as word processors and presentation software, this course traces the networks that emerging media technologies helped to bring into being, and the reciprocal roles that those same networks played in deciding which media became obsolete, and what, if anything, was preserved for posterity.

The readings for this course are all from the work of scholars who are interested in addressing the material, social and semiotic aspects of media (often simultaneously). Their theoretical frameworks are strongly influenced by two paradigms: archaeology and discourse networks on one hand, and articulation, assemblage and actor-network theory on the other. We will begin with an examination of these frameworks, which we will follow with a series of texts proposing “media archaeology” as a discrete field of inquiry; part of our collective project is to determine how much the latter group actually implements the theories and methods of the former. The remainder of the course consists of case studies organized around particular media objects; our goal is to develop a habit of thinking of media as historically, culturally and materially specific sites for the production of meaning.

### **Objectives**

1. Provide an introduction to the theoretical paradigms of archaeology, discourse networks, articulation, assemblage and actor-network theory.
2. Examine the foundational texts of “media archaeology” as a particular branch of contemporary media history.
3. Through a series of case studies, engage with the writing of a variety of contemporary media historians with the goal of studying both their subject matter and the ways in which they deploy (or don't) the theoretical frameworks introduced at the beginning of this course.
4. Increase awareness of the role of technology in art, and the role of ideology and aesthetics in technology

## Course Requirements

### 1. In-class participation 20%

All students are responsible for doing all readings, period. I expect you to be in class on time, with annotated copies of your readings in hand, and ready to contribute to the discussion. If discussion drops below a level I feel is appropriate, I reserve the right to reallocate participation marks to a dizzying and apparently endless series of quizzes. If you're wondering where to start, the class website (see below) is a good place to stage questions for discussion, and to see what your classmates have been thinking about.

Part of the in-class participation mark will also be based on several short critical responses to the readings that we'll do before presentations begin.

### 2. Online participation (class blogs) 20%

We will be using a content management system called Drupal for the class website. Drupal assigns each member of the seminar (including me) a blog page, and there will also be a central space for common discussion. Each week, you will be responsible for at least one 250-word post (doing more than the bare minimum number of probes and responses will be rewarded).

During the first four weeks of class (before presentations begin), you can consider this post to be a "probe" on issues that occur to you as a result of your encounter with one of the assigned readings. There's room for creativity here, as long as your probe also raises serious critical issues (look at Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride* or *Culture Is Our Business* for a general model of the probe, and for inspiration).

Once presentations begin, on weeks when you're not preparing your own presentation for posting (see below), your job will be to write a thoughtful 250-word response to the text of the presentation itself, or to one of the presenter's discussion questions for that week. Try to identify the strongest aspects of the presentation as well as to provide some consideration of what might have been missed, but take note: flame wars and invective will not be tolerated. We will also be building a number of collective documents, including a common bibliography of critical sources.

### 3. Seminar presentation 30%

Each seminar member (excluding me, because I'll be talking enough as it is) will be responsible for one 30-40 minute presentation (2500 words) relating to issues arising from a comparative analysis of at least two of the case study articles for the week in question (and yes, if you're presenting, and there are more than two articles, you still have to read all of them, and should be prepared to discuss them). A week *before* your presentation, you'll post the full text of your presentation, plus bibliography, to your blog page, along with 3-5 substantial questions for discussion that arose from your encounter with the article. The class will be responsible for beginning a discussion of your presentation online in the Comments section, and will continue it when we meet.

Media examples to illustrate the presentation are welcome, but don't use up a disproportionate amount of the allotted time, as your mark will be based largely on the critical acumen you bring to your reading.

#### 4. Term paper

30%

In the last class, you'll hand in a 15-20 page paper (250 words/page, double-spaced) with a bibliography containing a minimum of 8 sources from peer-reviewed journals or monographs (you can use appropriate online sources as long as you meet these basic requirements). The paper will be a case study presenting an archaeological analysis of a media technology of your choice. You should definitely make an appointment to come and speak with me about this paper before the half-way mark in the course. Try to keep your focus narrow; 20 pages might seem like a lot now, but you'll be surprised at how quickly you use them up once you begin to write.

#### **Required Texts**

All articles on this syllabus not available through TRELIS will be circulated before class or available on reserve at the library. Be sure to have your copies with you and read for each seminar meeting.

#### **Class Policies**

- Attendance and participation are mandatory. Missed lectures and tutorials will result in a significantly lower grade. Also, be on time. Walking in late disrupts the class.
- Be courteous. Listen carefully during lectures and tutorials. Avoid potential disruptions by turning your cell phone off before class.
- Assignment and exam dates are not flexible. The dates for the assignments and exams in the course are set well in advance and students are expected to honour them. Late papers or missed exams will not be excused without a doctor's note explaining that you were not able to fulfill the required assignment / exam on the specific date in question.
- The best time to speak with me is during office hours. If you need to arrange another time, please send an email or leave a phone message (contact information is at the top of the syllabus). If you send an email, here are the ground rules:
  - Use your official WLU email address <foo@wlu.ca> **ONLY**
  - Identify the course and the issue in the subject area of your message
  - Include your full name, student number and WLU email address in the signature of your message
  - I will usually take at least 72 hours to respond to email
- All assignments for this course will be assessed according to the standard WLU grading system. For more information, including what the letter grades mean, as well as policies regarding other issues concerning grading, such as revision and appeals, see <[www.wlu.ca/calendars/section.php?cal=1&s=95&sp=327&ss=324&y=12](http://www.wlu.ca/calendars/section.php?cal=1&s=95&sp=327&ss=324&y=12)>.

**Schedule**

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|---------------|---|
| <b>Jan 7</b>  | <b>Introduction</b>   |
| <b>Jan 14</b> | <p><b>Thinking Through Our Tools: The Materiality of Software</b><br/>Fuller, Matthew. "It Looks Like You're Writing A Letter: Microsoft Word." <i>Behind the Blip: Essays on the Culture of Software</i>. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2003. 137-65.</p> <p>Tufte, Edward. "The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within." <i>Beautiful Evidence</i>. Cheshire: Graphics Press LLC, 2006. 157-85.</p>   |
| <b>Jan 21</b> | <p><b>Archaeology and Discourse Networks: Foucault and Kittler</b><br/>Davidson, Arnold I. "Archaeology, Genealogy, Ethics." <i>Foucault: A Critical Reader</i>. Ed. David Couzens Hoy. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986. 221-33.</p> <p>Foucault, Michel. "On the Archaeology of the Sciences: Response to the Epistemology Circle." [1968]. <i>Foucault: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology</i>. [1994]. Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 vol. 2. Ed. James D. Faubion. Trans. Robert Hurley and others. New York: The New Press, 1998. Series Ed. Paul Rabinow. 297-333.</p> <p>Kittler, Friedrich. "Afterword to the Second Printing." <i>Discourse Networks 1800-1900</i>. [1985, 1987.] Trans. Michael Metteer with Chris Cullens. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990. 369-72.</p> <p>Krämer, Sybille. "The Cultural Techniques of Time Axis Manipulation: On Friedrich Kittler's Conception of Media." <i>Theory, Culture &amp; Society</i> 23 (7-8): 93-109.</p>   |
| <b>Jan 28</b> | <p><b>Articulation, Assemblage, Actor-Network: Hall, Deleuze &amp; Guattari, and Latour</b><br/>Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. "Introduction: Rhizome." <i>A Thousand Plateaus</i>. [1980.] Trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. 3-25.</p> <p>Latour, Bruno. "On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications Plus More Than A Few Complications." <i>Soziale Welt</i> 47.4 (1996): 369-81.</p> <p>Slack, Jennifer Daryl, and J. Macgregor Wise. "Causality," "Agency," "Articulation and Assemblage." <i>Culture &amp; Technology: A Primer</i>. New York: Peter Lang, 2005. 101-33.</p>  |
| <b>Feb 4</b>  | <p><b>Media Archaeology: A "description of the archive"</b><br/>Gitelman, Lisa. "Introduction: Media As Historical Subjects." <i>Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture</i>. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2006. 1-22.</p> <p>Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich. "A Farewell to Interpretation." <i>Materialities of Communication</i>. Ed. Timothy Lenoir and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Writing Science. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. 389-402.</p> <p>Huhtamo, Erkki. "From Kaleidoscomaniac to Cybernerd: Notes Toward An Archaeology of the Media." <i>Leonardo</i> 30.3 (1997): 221-224.</p> <p>Druckrey, Timothy. "Re-Imagining Archaeology." <i>Variantology 1: On Deep Time Relations of Arts, Sciences and Technologies</i>. Ed. Siegfried Zielinski, and Silvia M. Wagnermaier. Kunstwissenschaftliche Bibliothek 31. Köln: Verla der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2005. 249-58.</p> <p>Zielinski, Siegfried. "Media Archaeology." <i>CTheory</i> ga111 (7/11/1996). &lt;<a href="http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=42">www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=42</a>&gt;.</p> |

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| <p><b>Feb 11</b><br/><b>presentations begin today</b></p> | <p><b>Case study – Camera Obscurae: Looking at Frames</b><br/>Crary, Jonathan. "The Camera Obscura and Its Subject." <i>Techniques of the Observer</i>. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990. 25-66.</p> <p>Friedberg, Anne. "The Frame." <i>The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft</i>. Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2006. 60-93.</p> <p>Levine, Joshua. "Experimental Visual Experience Devices." <i>Leonardo</i> 33.1 (2000): 27-32.</p>  |
| <p><b>Feb 25</b></p>                                      | <p><b>Case study – Panoramas: Constructing Immersive Spaces</b><br/>Acland, Charles R. "IMAXtechnology and the Tourist Gaze." <i>Cultural Studies</i> 12.3 (1988): 429-45.</p> <p>Grau, Oliver. "Historic Spaces of Illusion" (excerpt) and "Intermedia Stages of Virtual Reality in the Twentieth Century: Art As Inspiration of Evolving Media." <i>Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion</i>. [2001.] Trans. Gloria Custance. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003. 52-71; 141-76.</p> <p>Schwartz, Vanessa R. "Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris." [1994.] <i>Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film</i>. Ed. Linda William. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997. 87-111.</p> |
| <p><b>Mar 3</b></p>                                       | <p><b>Case study – Graphic Lines: Plotting Phenomena</b><br/>Brain, Robert M. "Representation on the Line: Graphic Recording Instruments and Scientific Modernism." <i>From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature</i>. Writing Science. Ed. Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. 155-77.</p> <p>Headrick, Daniel R. "Statistical Graphs." <i>When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700-1850</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 123-30.</p> <p>Kahn, Douglas. "Concerning the Line." <i>Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts</i>. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999. 72-100.</p>  |
| <p><b>Mar 10</b></p>                                      | <p><b>Case study – Mechanical Typewriters: Automating Writing</b><br/>Gitelman, Lisa. "Automatic Writing." <i>Scripts, Grooves, and Writing Machines: Representing Technology in the Edison Era</i>. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. 184-218.</p> <p>Kittler, Friedrich. "Typewriter." <i>Gramophone, Film, Typewriter</i>. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. 183-231.</p>   |
| <p><b>Mar 17</b></p>                                      | <p><b>Case study – Headphones: Techniques of Listening</b><br/>Bull, Michael. "'To Each Their Own Bubble': Mobile Spaces of Sound in the City." <i>Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age</i>. Ed. Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy. London/New York: Routledge, 2004. 275-93.</p> <p>Douglas, Susan J. "Exploratory Listening in the 1920s." <i>Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos 'n' Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern</i>. New York: Times Books, 1999. 55-82.</p> <p>Sterne, Jonathan. "Audile Technique and Media." <i>The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction</i>. Durham &amp; London: Duke University Press, 2003. 137-77.</p>                                   |

Mar 24

**Case study – Electrical Telegraphs: Networking Things**

Siegert, Bernhard. "The Telegraph: Land and Sea." *Relays: Literature As An Epoch of the Postal System*. [1993.] Trans. Kevin Repp. Writing Science. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. 165-85.

Sterne, Jonathan. "Transportation and Communication: Together as You've Always Wanted Them." *Thinking with James Carey: Essays on Communications, Transportation, History*. Ed. Jeremy Packer and Craig Robertson. New York: Peter Lang, 2006. 117-55.

Stubbs, Katherine. "Telegraphy's Corporeal Fictions." *New Media 1740-1915*. Ed. Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey B. Pingree. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003. 91-111.

Mar 31

**Case study – Databases: Listing the World**

Ernst, Wolfgang. "Dis/continuities: Does the Archive Become Metaphorical in Multi-Media Space?" *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*. Ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Thomas Keenan. New York: Routledge, 2006. 105-23.

Liu, Alan. "Transcendental Data: Toward a Cultural History and Aesthetics of the New Encoded Discourse." *Critical Inquiry* 31 (Autumn 2004): 49-84.

Manovich, Lev. "Database As Symbolic Form." *Database Aesthetics: Art in the Age of Information Overflow*. Ed. Victoria Vesna. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. 39-60.

April 7

**Review**