DEAD MEDIA RESEARCH STUDIO
FALL 2011 / MW 3:30-4:45 / Silver Center, Room 410

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INTRODUCTION

This course is devoted to media archaeology, that is, historical research into forgotten, obsolete, neglected or otherwise dead media technologies. Depending on our understanding of "media" — one of the questions we'll discuss — these might include forms as diverse as typewriters, phonographs, Polaroid photography, prison tattoo codes and the Victorian language of floral bouquets, outmoded video game platforms, computing systems, and musical instruments, smoke signals, scent organs, shorthand notation, and rocket mail delivery. Our premise is that understanding these things can help us gain a better sense of the development, meaning and legacy of media technologies, now and in the future; our goal is to introduce students to the skills and resources necessary for producing rigorous research on such obsolete and obscure media. The course will include an exposure to scholarship in media archaeology; an intensive introduction to research methods; finding and exploring word, image, and sound archives; and the restoration of media artifacts to their deep social, cultural and personal context. The course stems from the premise that media archaeology is best undertaken, like any archaeological project, collaboratively: we will follow a hands-on research studio model commonly used in disciplines such as architecture or design.

STRUCTURE

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 topic 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 a wiki developed for museum collections.

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 student work. These will remain online as public documents, accessible both to other students as well as the general public.

SCHEDULE

September 8: Introduction to course
  • Ideas: Dead media, hype, atemporality

— 13: Introduction to media archaeology, pt 1
  • Ideas: Media; zeitgeist and context; design; training
  • Reading: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technical
Reproducibility"

— 15: Intro to media archaeology, pt 2: handles and grips
  • Ideas: Technological dramas; typologies; approaches
  • Reading: Brian Pfaffenberger, "Technological Dramas"

— 20: Intro to media archaeology, pt 3: researching and publishing
  • Ideas: Archives, wikis
  • Learning wiki software / library methods
  • Break into small groups
  • First object chosen

— 22: Light and shadow, part 1: Camera lucida, magic lantern
  • Reading: Siegfried Zielinski, "Light and Shadow"
  • Ideas: vision models mind, reflection vs. projection, tourism, storytelling

— 27: Light and shadow, part 2: Taking pictures
  • Reading: Siegfried Zielinski, "The Economy of Time"
  • Ideas: photography, Daguerrotypes, mechanization, consumerism

— 29: Light and shadow, part 3: Persistence of vision
  • Reading: Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (excerpts)
  • Ideas: Muybridge, Marey, phantasmagoria, guns, motion study

October 4: First student crit, part 1

— 6: First student crit, part 2
  • Second object chosen

— 11: *No class*

— 13: Auditions, part 1: Strips and grooves
  • Reading: *New Media, 1740-1915* (excerpts)
  • Ideas: Specialization (of functions), manifestation (of desires)

— 18: Auditions, part 2: Preserving voices
  • Reading: Jonathan Sterne, "A Resonant Tomb"
  • Ideas: Fear, projective time, shearing layers

— 20: Auditions, part 3: Voicemail
- Reading: Thomas Levin, "Before the Beep"
- Ideas: Materiality, readable media, digital-analog conversion

— 25: Second student crit, part 1

— 27: Second student crit, part 2
- Break into small groups
- Third object chosen

November 1: Words, part 1: Cutting type
- Reading: Rob Giampietro, "New Black Face"
- Ideas: Forms, media adoption, legacies, subtlety

— 3: Words, part 2: Writing machines
- Reading: Friedrich Kittler, "Typewriter" (excerpts)
- Ideas: Tactile, haptic, script/typography, training

— 8: Words, part 3: Files and folders
- Reading: Cornelia Vismann, *Files: Law and Media Technology* (excerpts)
- Ideas: Mediating law, stacks, standarization

— 10: Words, part 4: Hypertext
- Reading: Ted Nelson, *Computer Lib/Dream Machines* (excerpts)
- Ideas: Enfilade, shape of thought, ideal forms, constraint

— 15: Third student crit, part 1

— 17: Third student crit, part 2
- Fourth object chosen

— 22: Clothes: Workwear
- Reading: Olivier Salliard, "Essential Clothing: An Essay on the Overall, Utopian Garment and Eccentricity in Fashion"
- Ideas: Utility, nostalgia, skeumorphism, signaling

— 24: Money: Medium of exchange
- Reading: Mark C. Taylor, *Confidence Games: Money and Markets in a World Without Redemption* (excerpts)
- Ideas: Paper, credit, *signo*, bookkeeping, exchange and measurement

— 29: Fireworks: Heavenly and military spectacle
- Reading: Simon Werrett, *Fireworks: Pyrotechnic Arts and Sciences in European History* (excerpts)
- Ideas: Power displays, vitalism, "demo or die"

December 1: Gesture: Daily techniques
  • Reading: Eugenio Barba, *A Dictionary of Theater Anthropology: The Secret Art of the Performer* (excerpts), and William Forsythe's "In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated" (pas de deux only)
  • Ideas: Social and theatrical mediation, affect, lost forms

— 6: Fourth student crit, part 1

— 8: Fourth student crit, part 2

— 13: Course conclusions

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 solo dossier must be approximately 1000 words in length, each collaborative dossier about 3000. They must be historical and/or critical in nature, and may include textual, sonic, or visual material. Each dossier must be composed in the wiki, and therefore will be subject to public viewing and possible revision.

GRADE FORMULA

•   Dead media dossiers #1-4: 20% each, 80% total
•   Class participation: 20%

GRADING & REQUIREMENTS

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.