

Dead Media Research Studio

E59.-1021-001

NYU, Dept. of Media, Culture and Communication

Professors: Alex Galloway and Ben Kafka

Time: Wednesdays, 3:30pm - 6:10pm (Fall 2007)

Location: Conference Room, 239 Greene Street, 7th Floor

Overview

This course is devoted to media archaeology, that is, historical research into 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 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 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 student work. These will remain online as public documents, accessible both to other students as well as the general public.

Schedule

September 5 -- Course Introduction

September 12 -- Lecture: Overview of Media Archeology and historical research into material technologies

- Reading: Zielinski, "Introduction: The Idea of a Deep Time of the Media" and "Fortuitous Finds instead of Searching in Vain," pp. 1-38; Kittler, "Introduction," pp. 1-20.
- Artifact: Camera obscura.
- Themes: movable type, mechanized reproduction, scriptural vs typographical

September 19 -- Lecture: Research Fundamentals

- Reading: Zielinski, "Light and Shadow," pp. 101-158.
- Artifacts: Camera lucida.
- Themes: creation of the modern self, dark room w/ a light within, technical drawing, machine-mediated vision
- Guest: Jessica Alverson of Bobst Library
- Small groups created today; first objects assigned; schedule meetings w/ Jessica for next week.

September 26

- Reading: Zielinski, "Electrification, Tele-writing, Seeing Close Up," pp. 159-204.
- Artifact: Magic Lantern.
- Themes: domestic space, representation, projection, light, subjective vision

October 3

- Reading: Zielinski, "Magic and Experiment," pp. 57-100, and "The Economy of Time," pp. 227-254
- Artifact: Daguerreotype; stereoscope.
- Themes: photographic images, consumer image production, mechanized reproduction, 3d, travel/tourism, the beyond, subjectivity/consciousness
- Wiki training session

October 10

- Trip to MOMA (or MIAP?) to view 19th century visual technologies
- Reading: Kittler, "Film," pp. 115-182.
- Artifact: The Photographic Gun.
- Themes: film, photography, sampling time, Eadweard Muybridge, Étienne-Jules Marey.

October 17 -- 1st student crit

October 24

- 3:30-5pm -- Trip to Bobst Library for discussion of papyri and photographic processes with Laura McCann, Melitte Buchman, and Sarah Ziebell.

- Reading: Sterne, “Techniques of Listening,” pp. 87-136.
- Artifacts: Wax cylinder; vinyl LP record.
- Themes: analog audio inscription

October 31 -- 2nd student crit

November 7

- Reading: Kittler, “Typewriter,” pp. 183-266.
- Artifact: Typewriter; movable type, composing stick
- Themes: mechanized composition, QWERTY, tactile/haptic discipline, scriptural vs typographical

November 14 -- 3rd student crit

November 21 no class -- classes meet on a Monday schedule

November 28

- Reading: Sterne, “A Resonant Tomb,” pp. 287-333.
- Artifact: Telephone.
- Themes: electrification, sound, networks, real time, telepresence

December 5 -- 4th student crit

December 12 -- Course conclusion

Required Books

- Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Sanford, 1999).
- Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Duke, 2002).
- Siegfried Zielinski, *Deep Time of the Media: Toward an Archaeology of Hearing and Seeing by Technical Means* (MIT, 2006).

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 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.