

# Classes

## ENGL 603: Media Archeology

### Course Description

What is media archaeology? As Jussi Parikka describes, it is a subfield of media history that scrutinizes contemporary media culture through investigations of past media technologies and creative media practices. Media archaeology takes a special interest in recondite and forgotten apparatuses, practices and inventions. At an historical moment when our own media technologies become obsolete with increasing rapidity, the study of residual forms and practices provides valuable context for analysis, and perhaps the possibility for the emergence of something new.

This course deals with the theory, current practice, and possible trajectories of media archaeology as a discipline. Our object of study will be the research collection of the new Residual Media Depot of the Media History Research Centre at the Milieux Institute. Work will consist of a mix of writing, thinking, talking, and hands-on encounters with materials from the collection, according to student skills and interests.

Media Archaeology course syllabus 2016

Media Archaeology course syllabus 2017

Media Archaeology course syllabus 2020

## ENGL 645: The Research Collection

Research and teaching collections preserve a wide range of objects, including (but not limited to) scientific instruments, mineral samples, art objects, chapbooks and ephemera, consumer goods, magazines, architectural models, taxidermied animals, film, tissue samples, digital files, toys

and archaeological antiquities. Regardless of their role in the establishment of many disciplines, the history, structure and function of university collections (not-quite libraries, not-quite archives) remains under-theorized and poorly understood.

As David Ludwig and Cornelia Weber have described, various sorts of collections were integral to 19th-century university teaching and research across the disciplines. Over the course of the 20th century, the theoretical and institutional import of university collections gradually diminished. At the beginning of the 21st century, however, a renewed interest in the potential of university research collections is developing. This is partly in response to the growing relevance of theoretical perspectives like material media history, media archaeology and object-oriented ontology. Concerns about consumer culture, waste and sustainability also help, as does a high degree of general cultural interest in collecting, hoarding and trading practices.

This course will take two of Concordia's university research collections as its objects of study: The Richler Room and the Residual Media Depot. While studying the course readings, students will work closely with these two collections and their objects, looking for opportunities to interrogate and add to the body of theory as much as to apply the theory to the collections. The course will also include visits from archivists, curators, and scholars who have established and worked with research collections of their own.

Core course readings will consist of a variety of texts: philosophical musings on the nature of collecting (Benjamin's "Unpacking My Library" and "The Collector"; Baudrillard's *The System of Objects*, etc.); the existing literature on the subject of research and teaching collections (much of which originates in museum studies, art history and science and technology studies – Jules Davids Prown's "Mind in Matter," excerpts from Susan M. Pearce's *Interpreting Objects and*

*Collections*, etc.); contemporary writing on working with technological objects (Matthew Kirschenbaum et. al.'s report on *Digital Forensics and Born-Digital Content in Cultural Heritage Collections*; Henry Lowood's "The Hard Work of Software History" etc.); texts on collecting, selling and curating writers' libraries (e.g. Richard Oram's anthology) and so on.

Course work will consist of two short seminar presentations and a term project. In the first third of the course, students will identify a particular research project that triangulates their own interests with the core course materials and one of the two research collections. Sample projects might include the production of a paper on some aspect of the collection, but might also involve participation in database construction and design; investigation of specific problems of restoration and preservation; policy questions about space and funding; the development of policy for the growth and management of the collection; or a range of other such topics. The overall point is to instil in students a sense of themselves as active researchers as well as consumers of scholarly texts. Research and teaching collections preserve a wide range of objects, including (but not limited to) scientific instruments, mineral samples, art objects, chapbooks and ephemera, consumer goods, magazines, architectural models, taxidermied animals, film, tissue samples, digital files, toys and archaeological antiquities. Regardless of their role in the establishment of many disciplines, the history, structure and function of university collections (not-quite libraries, not-quite archives) remains under-theorized and poorly understood.