Syllabus: Media Archaeology 2017

ENGL 603: Media Archeology

May 23-27, 2017
3 credits

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Concordia Department of English course page

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.

Course Structure

This intensive one-week graduate course (5 days, Tuesday 23 May – Saturday 27 May 9 am – 5 pm inclusive) will run for the second time this year. It will consist of approximately 20 graduate students (PhD level preferred), approximately half from Concordia and half from elsewhere. Dr. Darren Wershler (CURC in Media & Contemporary Literature, Concordia) will lead the course, with special guests Dr. Jussi Parikka (Winchester School of Art) and Dr. Lori Emerson (University of Colorado Boulder).

Morning Seminar

During the actual course, mornings will follow a seminar model. Course members will receive their reading packages digitally in early May, and they will be expected to arrive ready to discuss this material. We will make frequent use of breakout groups of various kinds, concept mapping and daily individual blog posts to structure our conversation. In order to provide further context, all seminar members will also spend time locating media examples for in-class screenings in order to provide further contextual information.

Afternoon Projects

Afternoons will consist of work time for an individual or collective project in applied media archaeology. Students must propose their project before being accepted to the course (see APPLICATION PROCESS, at the end of this document). Students will have access to the Depot collection, some support from Research Assistants, plus any other necessary supplies that Milieux can provide (after a student is accepted, the instructors will determine what we can supply and what students will have to supply themselves). Projects might include, but are not limited to, the following:

- visual studies of the collection’s hardware
- readings of boxes, manuals and other textual materials

- platform studies of individual consoles in the collection
- media archaeologies, genealogies or geologies of particular consoles
- software studies of particular programs supported by the Depot’s machines
- modding of a particular console (either supplied by the student or purchased for them to work on while here)
- experiments with the Depot’s upscaling and signal processing equipment and displays
- fieldwork (e.g. a trip to the old Coleco factory, which is now an office loft, or trips to local retro stores, or arcades)
- white papers on the use of particular equipment in the Depot (e.g. how to set up RF consoles like the Atari 2600 or 5200 for classroom use)
- databasing the Depot collection (now underway)
  vuse the collection to test media-archaeological theory against real technology

- build an emulator, like a Retropie
- build an upscaler or a Supergun (a home-made console that plays old arcade boards)
- do some online bibliographic work around retro media collections, archives and labs

Students will have access to a full range of Milieux workspaces and equipment during this period.

We will also be running a collective project with Dr. Ann-Louise Davidson’s grad students from the Communities and Differential Mobilities research cluster, also housed in the Milieux Institute at Concordia. The project will involve the construction of two cocktail-table sized arcade emulators (pictures here: https://milieux.concordia.ca/cdm-research-clusters-latest-pilot-project-a-series-of-5-a-7-maker-jam-workshops/). If you’re

interested, you can participate in a number of ways: be involved in the actual fabrication; help to document the process; to participate in the creation of a white paper about the construction project; begin to work with us on a collaborative academic paper about the pedagogical aspect of the project; participate in the use of various qualitative research tools that Dr. Davidson has developed to analyze the experience of participants in projects like this one, which she also uses for community outreach with school children; theorize about the discursive differences between the ways that different fields take up the idea of maker culture and its relation to media archaeology.

Readings

Readings will be circulated before the course begins (and after all students are accepted). All seminar participants will arrive having completed the readings in advance. The readings themselves will consist in part of major texts from media archaeology, material media studies, cultural technique theory and articulation theory, and in part of new work that the instructors are preparing.

Tuesday – Media Archaeology

Ernst, Wolfgang. “Media Archaeography: Method and Machine Versus History and Narrative of Media.” *Digital Memory and the Archive*. Ed. Jussi Parikka. Electronic Mediations 39. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. 55-80.

Parikka, Jussi. “Media Theory and New Materialism” and “Archive Dynamics.” *What is Media Archaeology?* Malden: Polity Press, 2012. 63-90; 113-35.

Strauven, Wanda. “Media Archaeology: Where Film History, Media Art and New Media (Can) Meet.” *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art*. Ed. Julia Noordegraaf, Cosetta Saba, Barbara Le Maitre, and Vinzenz Hediger. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013. 59-79.

Wednesday – Cultural Techniques

Siegert, Bernhard. “Cultural Techniques: Or the End of the Intellectual Postwar Era in German Media Theory.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 30.6 (November 2013): 48-65.

Sterne, Jonathan. “Bourdieu, Technique and Technology.” *Cultural Studies* 17.3/4 (2003): 367–89.

Winthrop-Young, Geoffrey. “Cultural Techniques: Preliminary Remarks.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 30.6 (November 2013): 3-19.

Thursday – Labs and Spatial Practices of Knowledge Production

Svensson, Patrik. “Humanities Infrastructure.” *Big Digital Humanities: Imagining a Meeting Place for the Humanities and the Digital*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016.

Amy E. Earhart, “The Digital Humanities As a Laboratory.” *Between Humanities and the Digital*. Ed. Patrick Svensson and David Theo Goldberg. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015. 391-400.

Jentery Sayers, “Make, Not Brand: DIY after Big Data”, “The Relevance of Remaking”, “The MLab: An Infrastructural Disposition” http://maker.uvic.ca/notbrand/, http://maker.uvic.ca/remaking/, http://maker.uvic.ca/bclib15/

Friday – Infrastructure

Parks, Lisa, and Nicole Starosielski, eds. “Introduction.” *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures: The Geopolitics of Information*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015. 1-30.

John Durham Peters, “Infrastructuralism: Media as Traffic Between Nature and Culture.” *Traffic: Media as Infrastructures and Cultural Practice*s. Ed. Marion Näser-

Lather and Christoph Neubert. Leiden: Brill/Rodopi, 2015. 31-49.

Star, Susan Leigh. “The Ethnography of Infrastructure.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 43 (1999): 377-90.

Evaluation

Eligible students will receive 3 credits for this course. They will be graded according to the standard Concordia grading scale, based on the quality of their writing before and during the course (40% – about 6000 words in total, in the form of detailed academic blog posts), contributions to discussion during the morning seminar (30%), and the afternoon project work (30%).

Application Process

Interested students should submit a short (500-750 word) statement outlining their field of study, a few sentences on their projected doctoral project, and a description of how this course fits into their intellectual program. Students should also describe the nature of the afternoon project they would like to tackle during the course. (Instructors will be available to help successful applicants to develop these projects before and during the course itself.)