

CMS 572: Historiography of Media Technology (Archeology and Genealogy)
University of Washington
Department of Cinema and Media Studies
Spring Quarter 2020 (Extremely Online COVID-19 Edition)
Thursdays, 3:30 – 6:20 PM, on Zoom
Professor Mal Ahern (malahern@uw.edu)

Course description

This course, designed for graduate students in Cinema and Media Studies and related disciplines, introduces a variety of methodological approaches to the history of media technology. We will ask how new media technologies emerge, how these technologies obtain stable cultural meanings, and how media technology structures human communication. Readings and discussions will focus on Media Archeology, a set of methods that push against linear and progressivist narratives of media emergence, often by focusing on failed or forgotten technologies. The class will also stage encounters between Media Archeology and other approaches from Film History, Science and Technology Studies, Cultural Studies, and Infrastructure Studies. We will remain especially attentive to the influence of Michel Foucault on all of these methods, and to the distinction between his “archeological” and “genealogical” approaches.

Course requirements

Attendance and careful preparation of the week’s readings are crucial for the maintenance of a productive, interesting seminar. Remember that coming to seminar prepared ensures a positive learning environment for the entire classroom community, and not just yourself. Do the readings every week. Spend 20-30 minutes before class preparing with a few questions or prompts for general discussion, as well as identifying few specific passages you hope to analyze as a group.

The course will culminate in a final, written project. This project can take the form of one of the following:

- A first draft of a journal article of 6,000-8,000 words, on an original research topic
- A book review of a recent book on the history of media technology
- A review of the recent literature on the research topic of your choice

It is key to remember that this final project will be a draft—a first step on the route to something that could, down the line, be publishable. But only a first step. In the case of a research paper, I am not expecting exhaustive document-based research (an impossibility in a moment in which we cannot access physical libraries and archives), but rather the development of a research question, a set of sources, and a hypothesis. In the case of a book review or review of literature, you can submit a more polished and “final” product with a shorter word count. Students should set up individual Zoom meetings with me by week six in order to start sharing thoughts about the final project.

Schedule of Readings (Subject to Change and Revision)

Week 2: Media Archeology

- Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, "An Archaeology of Media Archaeology," from *Media Archaeology*, ed. Huhtamo and Parikka (University of California Press, 2011), 1-24
- Wolfgang Ernst, "Media Archaeography: Method and Machine versus History and Narrative of Media," from *Media Archeology*, 239-255
- Jussi Parikka, "Introduction: Cartographies of the Old and New," in *What is Media Archaeology?* (Polity: 2012), 1-18
- Thomas Elseasser, "The New Film History as Media Archeology," *CiNéMAS* 14:2-3 (2004), 75-117

Week 3: Foucault's Archeology and Genealogy

- Packer and Morena, "Media Genealogy and the Politics of Archeology," *International Journal of Communication* 10 (2016), 3141-3159.
- Michel Foucault, "The Archeology of Knowledge," in *Foucault Live: Selected Interviews*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Semiotext[e], 1986), 57-64
- Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," from *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*
- Gary Cutting and Johanna Oksala, "Michel Foucault," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/foucault/>

Week 4: Case Study: The Camera Obscura and (Early) Modern Vision

- Jonathan Crary, "Modernity and the Problem of the Observer" and "The Camera Obscura and its Subject," from *Techniques of the Observer* (MIT Press, 1992), 1-67
- Svetlana Alpers, "Ut pictura, ita visio: Kepler's Model of the Eye and the Nature of Picturing in the North," 23-71

Week 5: The Stabilization of Objects

- Trevor Pinch and Weibe Biker, "The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts (1984)," from *The Social Construction of Technological Systems* (MIT Press, 2012), 11-40.
- Rick Altman, "Crisis Historiography," from *Silent Film Sound* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 15-23.
- Francesco Casetti, "Primal Screens," from *Screen Genealogies*, ed. Buckley, Campe, and Casetti (Amsterdam University Press: 2019), 27-50.

Week 6: Medienwissenschaft: Kittler

- Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Stanford University Press, 1999 [1986]).

Note: This book is huge. But it's hard to select just one chapter for you to read. My solution is to tell you what to focus on and ask you to skim the rest. Read Winthrop-Young's translator's introduction (an incredibly helpful overview), and Kittler's preface and introduction. Read at least one of the three chapters thoroughly in order to get a sense of method and style. On the rest, do the best you can.

Week 7: Case Study: Mediated Sound

- Jonathan Sterne, "Hello!" (1-30), "Plastic Aurality: Technologies into Media" and "The Social Genesis of Sound Fidelity" (179-288), from *The Audible Past* (Duke University Press, 2003).
- Alexander Weheliye, "Hearing Sonic Afro-Modernities" from *Phonographies* (Duke University Press, 2005), 1-45
- Lisa Gitelman, "The Case of Phonographs," from *Always Already New* (MIT Press, 2006), 25-88
- Mara Mills, "Deafening: Noise and the Engineering of Communication in the Telephone System," *Grey Room* 43 (Spring 2011), 118-143.

Week 8: Infrastructure Studies

- Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, Introduction to *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* (University of Illinois Press, 2015), 1-30.
- Jennifer Holt and Patrick Vonderau, "Where the Internet Lives": Data Centers as Cloud Infrastructure," in *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* (University of Illinois Press, 2015).
- Tara McPherson, "U.S. Operating Systems at Mid-Century: The Intertwining of Race and UNIX," in *Race After the Internet*, ed. Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White (Taylor & Francis, 2012).
- Tung-Hui Hu, selections from *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (MIT Press, 2015)

Week 9: Ideology and Infrastructure

- Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (University of Chicago Press, 2006)
- Browse the Computer Magazine Archives at Archive.org and bring **three documents**

Week 10: TK

Finals Week: Presentations and research sharing