

MEDIA ARCHAEOLOGY (Statement)

[Statement on occasion of the book presentation of Erkki Huhtamo / Jussi Parikka (eds.), *Media Archaeology*, University of California Press 2011, at Humboldt University of Berlin, Institute of Musicology and Media Studies, July 15, 2011, Media Theatre]

The term "archaeography" in the title of my book contribution is meant to indicate alternative models of thinking the being of media in (emphatic) time, thus: an alternative to narrative historiography. No narratives of media origins in the historic sense, but rather the indication of another level of media tempor(e)alities: governing principles, archaic essentials.

"Media archaeology" encompasses a variety of approaches to media, all of them are interrelated but as well well differentiated. To name the levels, media archaeology is

- a method of media analysis
- addressing the structural level of media practice (which Foucault named as the governing laws of media, such as Internet protocols or the von-Neumann-architecture of digital computers)
- an aesthetics (the "cold gaze" of distanced understanding)
- an "archivology", that is: deeply obliged to archival evidence and historical as well as technological precision (circuit diagrams as source of evidence, f. e.)
- a nostalgia for the analogue (certainly, but this should be kept private)
- an art form (Paul de Marinis) which reduces media to its basics as opposed to the intangible hiddenness of micro-chip based media today ("reduced to the max")
- a form of generating knowledge with the media themselves as active agents / archaeologists (like digital signal processing which restored early "phonographic" records of John Logie Baird's experimental electro-mechanical television)
- a gesture of "open source" (de-constructing hardware): not in the sense of public usage of source codes in programming, but in the sense of dis-mantling media from their designed enframing, un-clothing)
- an approach close to the materiality of media, here akin to Classical Archaeology which deals with the material remains of a culture (as opposed to philological hermeneutics)

But caution, let us not be seduced by the archaeological metaphor. Media archaeology is n o t about beginnings, about origins in the temporal sense, but rather about the *arché*, the laws governing media in action. These principles are rather structural than temporal, though it happens that at its emergence a medium most openly reveals its structures before it becomes dissimulated by interfaces.

I remember my first active performance at Sophienstraße, when I was proud to lecture on Friedrich Kittler's chair during his sabbatical in 2002. The title of my then lecture was "The cold gaze" - a description of the media-archaeological aesthetics indeed, somewhat close to Ernst Jünger's photographic media aesthetics I have to admit. Admittedly, German pre-war engineering culture still lurks through, just like in Ernst Jünger's aesthetics of the photographic "cold gaze", and the Heideggerian ways of fundamental re-thinking of terms like technology. Today, I would add the "the cold gaze": the unpassionate ears (listening to the "sonic", that is: sound emerging from technomathematical media).

There have been ongoing rumours about a certain technology-centric, that is: machine- and code-centered school of media studies.¹ According to this view, the field of (new) media theory seems split between two very different approaches: "Media archaeologists, like Kittler, Wolfgang Ernst or Alexander Galloway describe the non-discursive practices of the techno-cultural archive. Media phenomenologists like Katherine Hayles, Tara McPherson or Mark B. N. Hansen analyze how phenomena in various media appear to the human cognitive apparatus, that is, to the mind and senses."² What is clear by this arbitrary name list already, is that the theoretical front is not one between continental European media archaeologists and media archivists on the one side and Anglo-speaking cultural critics of media practices on the other, but rather an epistemological rupture and positioning. The archaeological / archival approach is rooted as much in Foucault's definitions³ as it is connected with Marshall McLuhan's non-contentist media analysis. Whereas Hansen in his discussion of what is an "image" in the age of new (that is, electronic and digital) media, in an explicit Bergsonian tradition insists on the coming-into-being of the mediated image in the "enframing" acts of the human bodily cognition only⁴,

1 As expressed in Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, Introduction. Did Someone Say New Media?, in: New Media, Old Media. A History and Theory Reader, eds. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun / Thomas Keenan, New York / London (Routledge) 2006, 1-10 (4)

2 Kjetil Jakobsen, in chapter 6 of his text "Anarchival Society", discusses "Archaeology versus phenomenology", in: Eivind Røssaak (ed.), The Archive in Motion. New Conceptions of the Archive in Contemporary Thought and New Media Practices, Oslo (Novus) 2010, 127-154 (141)

3 The archive "governs the appearance of statements as unique events", whereas archaeology "questions the already-said at the level of its existence <...> and the general archive system to which it belongs": Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, New York (Tavistock) 1972, 129 and 131

4 Mark B. N. Hansen, New Philosophy of New Media, Cambridge, Mass. (MIT Press) 2004, 13. See Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory, New York (Zone Books) 1988, 35f

"posthuman cultural studies"⁵ radical media archaeology takes the point of view of the machine itself, with "radical" to be interpreted in two ways: going to the roots (which is the archive), to the beginnings (less historic causality but temporal originality: the opening and generation of the time-critical *momentum*⁶ and of temporal horizons), and in the sense of the mathematical (square root) as the constitutive force in algorithmic, techno-mathematical media.

This approach is markedly different from the approaches of Cultural Studies. But after 20 years of Sophienstraße, 8 years of Media Studies proper here, years have passed inbetween. With a vibrant media-theoretical discussion in the English speaking world, there has been a translation barrier for relevant texts so far, different from the world of techno-mathematical engineering which would cross-culturally wire artefacts into standard operation. What looked like an antithetical configuration in German hardware-orientated and Anglo-American socially and culturally orientated media studies for a long time, nowadays seems "sublated" by a Hegelian trick ("List") of media-theoretical reason. So-called software studies⁷ and a refreshed materialist (forensic) approach⁸ links both cross-Atlantic schools.

5 Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, Cultural Studies and German Media Theory, in: Gary Hall / Clare Birchall (eds), *New Cultural Studies*, Edinburgh (Edinburgh University Press) 2006, 88-104 (100)

6 See Axel Volmar (ed.), *Zeitkritische Medien*, Berlin (Kulturverlag Kadmos) 2009

7 See Matthew Fuller (Hg.), *Software Studies. A Lexicon*, Cambridge, Mass. / London (MIT Press) 2008; Jussi Parikka, *Digital Contagions. A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses*, New York et al. (Peter Lang) 2007

8 See M. Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms. New Media and the Forensic Imagination*, Cambridge, MA (The MIT Press) 2008