

CAMS 106Y: FYS: Ghostly Mediums: Specters and Hauntings in Media History and Technology

Course Number: CAMS 106Y

Term: Fall 2018

Credit: 1, graded

Date & Time: W 2:15-4:45PM

Location: PNW 309

Instructor: N. Adriana Knouf (nknouf@wellesley.edu; <http://zeitkunst.org>); JAC 357a, x2105

Office Hours: T 3-4PM, or by appointment

Course Description

Specters haunt the nether-regions of media technology. Each new medium has offered potential avenues to hear the voices of the departed or contact otherworldly beings. In this course we will explore these possibilities through close attention to the ways in which media attempts to move beyond the earthly plane. These are extraordinary claims whose veracity is always under question but also tell us much about our own desires. We'll consider photography, phonography, magnetic tape, television, radio, and the internet, among other mediums. Students will also have the chance to test some of these claims through hands-on exercises and their own attempts to push the boundaries of media communication. No formal background in media history or production is required.

Course Goals

At the end of the course, students will be able to

- Know the basic elements of media history
- Understand how media technologies can be used beyond their original intentions
- Analyze extraordinary claims about the possibilities of media
- Explore the material aspects of media that lend themselves to otherworldly potentials
- Synthesize course materials into a research project

Required Texts

- Texts available in Sakai
- Online resources

Recommended Texts

You are not required to purchase these texts, but these are some useful books that you may want to reference at some point in the semester:

- Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001 [1989]).
- Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

Course Requirements

- Completion of all required reading
- Participation in class discussion
- Regular “investigations”
- One or two short papers analyzing and investigating ghostly media
- Final project that synthesizes the material from the course

Teaching philosophy

I am of the belief that theory and practice are fundamentally intertwined. As such, we will do a lot of “hands-on” learning in this course, alongside our discussion of theoretical texts. Additionally, I am less interested in the rehearsal of the minute details of the texts under study and rather want to encourage you to think expansively about how media theory informs media practice, and vice versa. Finally, I want the classroom to be a space where challenging critique and conversation can take place; please be respectful of the opinions and comments of other students in class, and I will do the same.

How to Succeed in this Class

At the bare minimum you must complete the requirements for the course as outlined above. Beyond this you must be willing to take some risks, to challenge yourself to go further in your analysis of the works or in the production of small projects. See the grading rubric for more information.

Assignments and Requirements

This class meets once a week. I expect you to be present at all classes. We may have additional optional sessions scheduled outside of class; more on this later in the semester.

Participation: (10%)

The importance of the works under discussion lies not in the works themselves, but rather in their inter-relationship with our discussions and other media that you and I encounter in our lives. Thus class participation is vital to the success of this course. Simply attending class will not be enough to earn full participation credit; instead, you must be an *active* participant, someone who comes prepared and engages with all aspects of the class.

Investigations (30%)

I believe that it is very useful to get some “hands-on” experience with ghostly or haunted media. So there will be occasional “investigations” that I will ask you to do that explore, in a material fashion, different aspects of the spectral in media. More information about these assignments will come later in the course.

Short paper(s) (20%)

I also want you to get some experience writing about ghostly media from an analytical perspective. You will write at least one, but no more than two, short papers (3–5 pages) about some topic that is relevant to the course. We will discuss the scope of the paper together. More information about these papers will come later in the course.

Final project (30%)

You will complete a final project that incorporates some synthesis of the material that we have been discussing and viewing and experiencing this semester. This final project can be creative, analytical, or some combination of both. You will discuss this project with me beforehand so that we can agree on the scope. You will also present on your project on the last day of the course. More information will be given out later in the semester.

Optional: participation in a concert!

My colleague Professor Jenny Johnson in the Music Department and I are putting on a concert on November 10th in Houghton Chapel entitled *The Alien (Dear Interlocutor)* that will involve a variety of compositions that touch on aspects that are central to this course. This performance will involve a fair bit of technological experimentation and implementation that both her and I could use help with. If you are interested in participating, please let me know! I’ll be sharing more information about this as the course goes on.

Grading

Grading rationale

A grade of “A” is given to students who meet with conspicuous excellence every demand which can fairly be made by the course.

A grade of “B” is given to those students who add to the minimum of satisfactory attainment excellence in not all, but some of the following: organization, accuracy, originality, understanding, insight.

A grade of “C” is given to those students who have attained a satisfactory familiarity with the content of a course and who have demonstrated ability to use this knowledge in a satisfactory manner.

A grade of “D” is a passing grade. There is no grade of D+ or D-.

Grading is non-competitive: helping your classmates will never harm your grade.

Administrivia

Absence & Late policy

Absences are allowed in three circumstances: personal illness, family crisis, or college-sanctioned activity. In all three cases I ask to be informed as soon as possible in advance so that we can make proper arrangements for completing the missed work—knowing that in true crisis situations advance notice may not be possible. Excused absences are the only cases in which work can be turned in late without penalty. In all other cases, late work will result in a 10% decrease in your grade for each day it is late, and will be accepted up to one week after the due date. *Please do not turn in work late:* it is highly detrimental to your overall performance, makes it very easy to fall behind, is disruptive to the other students who completed the assignments on time, and adds an additional burden on me in terms of finding time to grade your assignment at a later date. It is oftentimes in your best interest to turn in on time a less-than-perfect assignment rather than a slightly-closer-to-perfect late one.

All students are allowed one unexcused absence. One unexcused absence beyond that will result in a zero (0) participation grade for the course. Further unexcused absences beyond that may result in an automatic F for the course.

Cold Calling

If I see that you are not participating much in class, I may decide to cold call on you. It thus is important to be prepared to speak at every class session, and to participate regularly. This will produce a class environment that fosters your own learning, as well as that of your fellow students. Your opinions and comments matter.

Content

Given the topic of this course, it goes without saying that issues of death, mourning, horror, suicide, and trauma are likely to come up regularly. As such, I assume that choosing to take this class indicates that you have a willingness to address these topics. I do not presume to know what experiences you may or may not have had with these issues; nevertheless, I will do my best to forewarn you of things that might cause particularly troubling responses. If you need to leave class at any point during a discussion, please feel free to do so. I just ask that you then come talk to me afterwards so that we can discuss what happened and what I can do to help.

There is support for mental issue concerns available at the Stone Center on campus.

E-mail

Any questions of a non-personal nature regarding course content, assignments, etc., should be posted to the “General Discussion” Sakai forum, as it is likely other students in the course either have a similar question or can provide you with an answer! Personal questions can be discussed over e-mail, during office hours, or by appointment. I will try to respond to all e-mails within 24 hours. I generally reply to e-mails during business hours during the week, and rarely reply to e-mails on the weekends. Please send e-mail from your Wellesley account to ensure that it does not inadvertently end up in my spam folder.

One final note regarding e-mail: please use proper salutations and grammar in writing your e-mail. (This also goes for forum posts on Sakai.) It might seem like a minor point, but it goes a long way towards producing the environment that is conducive to our joint learning!

Feedback and Comments

I will provide varying levels of feedback on your assignments during the semester. For shorter assignments, this may come in the form of a few short phrases or words. For longer assignments I will provide more extensive comments, not only on content but also on form and mechanics. This feedback might appear at times to be rather direct; know, however, that whenever I provide feedback it is in the service of making you a better writer, a better thinker, a better maker. I am of course more than willing to discuss my feedback with you in person.

Grading concerns

Please take at least 24 hours to review my comments before contacting me regarding any grading concerns. I prefer to do this during office hours or a scheduled appointment, and not before or after class.

Honor code

I want to remind you of the honor code: “As a Wellesley College student, I will act with honesty, integrity, and respect. In making this commitment, I am accountable to the community and dedicate myself to a life of honor.” I expect that you will act accordingly, and you can expect I will do the same.

The College and I take plagiarism seriously. Please be sure to reference any materials you quote or paraphrase, no matter the medium. Let me know if you have any questions regarding this issue.

Pronouns

On the first day of class, and after midterms, we will share our pronouns with each other. If your pronouns change at some other point during the semester, please let me know.

Paper formatting and guidelines

Please turn in papers and summaries with proper grammar and spelling. If either detract from my ability to understand your argument, I reserve the right to decrease your grade accordingly.

Papers should be turned in electronically to Sakai, doubled-spaced using a standard serif font (Cambria, Garamond, Georgia, Palatino, Times New Roman, etc.) at a size of 12pt with 1in margins. Please do not try to increase your page count through creative combinations of font, font size, and margins: I've seen it all, I've even tried it myself (and have often failed), and your time would be better spent working on the substance of your paper.

Please be consistent in your choice of citation format; I do not care if you use Chicago, MLA, or APA. As with spelling and grammar, if your citations detract from my ability to understand your paper, I reserve the right to decrease your grade accordingly.

Social Media

It is my policy to not add students as friends on Facebook until they have graduated. I do have a public Twitter handle ([zeitkunst](#)) and if Twitter is your thing and if you are interested, feel free to follow me there (although of course there is no obligation to do so). I have a public website at <http://zeitkunst.org>.

Students with disabilities

If you have a disability and need accommodations, please contact Jim Wice, Director of Disability Services, in Clapp Library 316 to arrange these accommodations. See <http://www.wellesley.edu/disability> for more information.

Schedule

This schedule is subject to change, but any changes will be announced in advance in class and posted to the Sakai site for the course.

Week 1: Considering the ghostly and spectral

September 5

Introductions, and an exploration of the ghostly in the televisual.

Week 2: Spiritualism and the “spirit telegraph”

September 12

Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), “Mourning, Media, and the Cultural Politics of Conjuring the Dead”, 17–65

Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001 [1989]), “Unbroken Communication between the Infinite and All Beings”, 10–31.

Investigation due: investigation of ghostly presences on campus.

Week 3: Spirit Photography

September 19

Tom Gunning, “Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theater, Trick Films, and Photography’s Uncanny,” in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 42–71.

Louis Kaplan, “Where the Paranoid Meets the Paranormal: Speculations on Spirit Photography,” *Art Journal* 62, no. 3 (2003): 19–29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3558518>.

Simone Natale, “A short history of superimposition: From spirit photography to early cinema,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 10, no. 2 (2012): 125–145.

Optional reading: Tom Gunning, “To Scan a Ghost: The Ontology of Mediated Vision,” *Grey Room* - (2007): 94–127.

Optional viewing: *Shutter* (2004), <https://wellesley.kanopy.com/video/shutter>.

Special class session with Kate Johnson about photo, video, and audio editing.

Week 4: The Uncanny: from ghosts to robots

September 26

Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (Penguin Books, 2003 [1919]), 121–161.

Masahiro Mori, "The Uncanny Valley," Translated by Karl F. MacDorman and Takashi Minato, *Energy* 7, no. 4 (1970): 33–35, <http://www.androidscience.com/theuncannyvalley/proceedings2005/uncannyvalley.html>.

Viewing: Mamoru Oshii, *Ghost in the Shell (Kôkaku Kidôtai)* (1995), Film.

Week 5: Recording the voices of the dead

October 3

Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), "A Resonant Tomb", 287–333.

Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford University Press, 1999), selections.

Week 6: Aetheric radio

October 10

Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), "The Voice from the Void", 59–91.

Douglas Kahn, *Earth Sound Earth Signal: Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts* (Berkeley, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2013), "Thomas Watson: Natural Radio, Natural Theology", 25–33; "The Aelectrosonic and Energetic Environments", 53–68; "Inductive Rado and Whistling CUrrents", 69–82.

Listening: works by Anna Friz, Alvin Lucier, and others

Week 7: Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP)

October 17

Anthony Enns, "Voices of the Dead: Transmission/Translation/ Transgression," *Culture, Theory & Critique* 46, no. 1 (2005): 11–27.

Matthew Clark, "Phantasms of the Living," *The Antioch Review* 68, no. 1 (2010): 36–53.

Michael A. Nees and Charlotte Phillips, "Auditory Pareidolia: Effects of Contextual Priming on Perceptions of Purportedly Paranormal and Ambiguous Auditory Stimuli," *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 29, no. 1 (2015): 129–134.

Optional reading: Deborah P. Dixon, "I hear dead people: science, technology and a resonant universe," *Social & Cultural Geography* 8, no. 5 (October 2007): 719–733.

Exploration of the "spirit radio" and magnetic tape.

Week 8: Ghosts on screen

October 24

Andrew Utterson, "Water buffalo, catfish and monkey ghosts: the transmigratory materialities of Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 15, no. 2 (2017): 231–249, eprint: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2017.1311088>, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2017.1311088>.

Désirée Kriesch, "'They only see what they wanna see': Traumatized Ghosts and Ghost Story Conventions in *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others*," in *Ghosts - or the (Nearly) Invisible: Spectral Phenomena in Literature and the Media* (Peter Lang AG, 2016), 71–86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2t4d7f.10>.

Week 9: Hauntings of the middle passage

October 31

Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 2 (2003): 287–302.

Mike Rubin, "Infinite Journey to Inner Space: The Legacy of Drexciya," 2017, accessed September 13, 2018, <http://daily.redbullmusicacademy.com/2017/06/drexciya-infinite-journey-to-inner-space>.

Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008 [1997]), "her shape and his hand", 3–28.

Viewing: Akomfrah, John. *Last Angel of History* (1996), film.

Listening: Drexciya, *Bubble Metropolis*, Underground Resistance 026, 1993, LP.

Optional Reading: Kodwo Eshun, "Fear of a Wet Planet - Kodwo Eshun on Drexciya," 2010 [1997], accessed September 13, 2018, https://www.last.fm/user/sannur/journal/2010/12/28/44l6br_fear_of_a_wet_%20planet_-_kodwo_eshun_on_drexc%EE%80%80!a.

Investigation due: Aetheric radio

Week 10: Spectral Holograms

November 7

Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, "Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane," *TDR: The Drama Review* 54, no. 1 (2010): 14–38.

Regina Arnold, "There's a Spectre Haunting Hip-hop: Tupac Shakur, Holograms in Concert and the Future of Live Performance," in *Death and the Rock Star*, ed. Catherine Strong and Barbara Lebrun (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), 177–188.

Optional reading: Ken McLeod, "Living in the Immaterial World: Holograms and Spirituality in Recent Popular Music," *Popular Music & Society* 39, no. 5 (2016): 501–515.

Investigation due: exploring EVP

Week 11: Queer Spectralities

November 14

Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), "Secular Spirits: A Queer Genealogy of Untimely Sexualities," 154–176.

Carla Freccero, "Queer Spectrality: Haunting the Past," in *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, ed. María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 335–359.

Paper due

Week 12

November 21

No class: Thanksgiving break!

Week 13: Afterlives of social media

November 28

Jed R. Brubaker, Gillian R. Hayes, and Paul Dourish, "Beyond the Grave: Facebook as a Site for the Expansion of Death and Mourning," *Information Society* 29, no. 3 (2013): 152–163.

Denisa Kera, "Designing for Death and Apocalypse: Theodicy of Networks and Uncanny Archives," *Information Society* 29, no. 3 (2013): 177–183.

Week 14: Finalities

December 5

Final presentations and discussions.