

## DEAD MEDIA REVIVAL: PHOTOGRAPHY

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*Archeological artworks are time machines.*

—Erkki Huhtamo, “Resurrecting the Technological Past”

### Overview

In groups of two or three, present a “dead” form of photography that you have tangibly revived. Take at least twelve photographs in the style of the given photographic form and demonstrate your process and technique to the class, along with a slideshow that presents the history of the photographic form with key facts. This assignment is worth 20% of your final grade.

### Basics

You will have 20 minutes in which to introduce the dead medium, present its revival (your photographs), and relay what you learned as well as what we should know. In your slides, include imagery, film clips, key facts. Physical objects, artifacts, props, and so on are strongly encouraged for demonstration.

### Bibliography

An annotated bibliography (Chicago style) should be sent to me by the due date of the presentation. Your research should include at least five scholarly examples (published by university presses or in peer-reviewed journals). Use our library and resources introduced in class such as JSTOR, ProQuest, and Lantern. Students are encouraged to discuss the project with me for further research guidance.

### Respondents

In addition to presenting on a given photographic topic, you must sign up to be a respondent for three other presentations. This means that, in advance of the day, you have done a bit of informal reading on the day’s topic (i.e., spirit photography), and arrive prepared to ask an intelligent question of the group during the Q&A.

### Schedule and Topics

We have been preparing for this assignment: we visited the Florida Museum of Photographic Arts for inspiration; we read Sterling’s “Media Paleontology.” Now, we use this background to research a dead medium. A sign-up sheet for group topics will be made available shortly; the composition of the group is determined by voluntary interest in the topic. There are eight forms of photography to select from.

1. Camera Obscura / Pinhole Photography (see, e.g., Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*)
2. Pictorialist Photography (see, e.g., Homer, *Alfred Stieglitz and the Photo-Secession*)
3. Stereoscopic Photography (see, e.g., Earle, *The Stereograph*)
4. Panoramic Photography (see, e.g., Gustavson, *500 Cameras*)
5. Balloon Aerial Photography (see, e.g., Hallion, *Taking Flight*)
6. Spirit Photography (see, e.g., Gunning, “Phantom Images”)
7. Chronophotography (see, e.g., Braun, *Picturing Time*)
8. Carnival Photography (“Mug Joint”) (see, e.g., Philips, *Fantasy Travel*)

### **Prompts**

As you develop your presentation, consider some of the following questions. (Not every question will not be pertinent for every medium.)

How can you profitably employ our class terminology and concepts?

Does your medium/form of photography live on? In fact, as an echo, as a metaphor, or in another medium?

How was your photography reflected in the culture? (E.g., Was it in a film? Were there essays concerning it?)

What would a media archaeologist say about your topic?

What does your form of photography tell us about people at the time of its existence? Who was represented in your form of photography, and who was not? What can we learn from this representation or lack thereof?

What is the earliest example that relates to your form of photography? How has the given form changed over time?

What other medium or movement does your form of photography engage with or relate to? Are there contemporary parallels?

What attempts have been made to bring the “dead medium” back to life?

How did you reinvent your medium? How did you change or update it? What impact on the medium or your understanding of it did these changes have?

What did you learn from your own revival of a dead form of photography?

What theoretical concerns arise from the medium? (How does the medium engage with the readings that we have discussed?)

What can we learn, conceptually, by examining the technical parameters of the form of photography? To paraphrase Ernst: media hardware is an epistemological snapshot of its society.

What can we learn from studying the “inventor,” if there is one? Why were they interested in the medium?

What is a famous example of your photography? What are some less well-known examples?

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These are merely provisional prompts.

You are the researchers/presenters and will be the best judge of germane information.