standing-room-only crowd greeted Jussi Parikka (Director, Cultures and Digital Economy Research Institute [CoDE], Anglia Ruskin University, UK), curious to hear his appropriately titled, pre-Halloween talk, “Media Archaeology as Zombie Media Research.”

Defining himself as a “media archaeologist,” Parikka characterizes the discipline as loosely defined and a bit inchoate. For instance, as of yet there are no academic journals or conferences devoted to media archeology. It is best described as “an emerging attitude” and a congeries of tactics in current media theory which are most visibly identified with the “uncovering and re-circulating of forgotten, repressed, or neglected media approaches and technologies.”

As for zombie media research, media archaeology is sometimes seen as aligning itself with a “history of losers,” though it is also known to “resurrect” dead technologies. It traces its roots to theories of visual culture as part of the new media boom of the late 1980s and 1990s, rather than from the field of archaeology, though it also owes debts to a wide range of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Aby Warburg, and Marshall McLuhan.

Media archaeology also has a close affinity with certain art practices—including the arts associated with DIY (Do It Yourself) culture, circuit bending, and hardware hacking—and aligns itself with “re-culture” in that it supports re-cycling, re-using, re-mixing, and re-mediating. In fact, Parikka’s presentation at the Center came from a collaborative project with the artist Garnet Hertz, entitled “Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method,” intended “to excavate bodies of memory held not only by the human mind but also the memory of things, of objects, of chemicals, and circuits that are...
Jussi Parikka, “Media Archaeology as Zombie Media Research”

returned to nature, so to speak, after their cycle.”

[Editor's note: Parikka and Hertz’s collaborative project has been nominated for the prestigious 2011 Vilém Flusser Theory Award through Berlin’s Transmediale project.]

Parikka reminded us of our era of hyper-obsolescence by reporting that the Environmental Protection Agency states that 250 million of all our discarded consumer electronics each year are still functioning, and hence can be considered to be “media zombies.” He noted that “ever since the start of the digital information revolution, which had its discursive roots in a long lineage of fatalistic communications, such as disembodied angels and nineteenth century fancies of telepathic communications, we have been promised a discursive disembodiment”—which now is “embedded in a large pile of network wires, lines, routers, switches, and other very material things that will be trashed.”

When considering contemporary consumer products, planned obsolescence takes many forms. Planned obsolescence, however, is “not just an ideology, but also a discourse that more accurately takes place on a micro-political level of design.” Citing Bruno Latour, one of the primary developers of actor-network theory, Parikka noted that technological products are designed as black boxes, with no user-serviceable parts inside. Things are not supposed to be fixed, but replaced. Although these “black box” objects are considered “dead” once broken, they never truly are since each is made up of “various temporalities, of relations and potentials that can be brought together and torn apart.” The dead can and do walk among us.

Despite this long history of planned obsolescence in the twentieth century, there has also been a tradition that fights against it: in the art world that resistance can be seen as early as the ready-mades, collages, and montages of Duchamp, Picasso, and Braque. “Since a significant portion of ready made trash in American and Western society is [now] electronic waste, artists have shifted to working with obsolete electronics. So this ‘standing reserve’ (Bestzung, in the Heideggerian sense) of available raw materials used by culture has shifted from the traditional raw materials—wood, paper, metal—to manufactured consumer waste.”

To conclude the presentation, Parikka projected “The Maker’s Bill of Rights” from the DIY website, makezine.com, which includes, among others, the declarations, “Components, not entire subassemblies, shall be replaceable,” “Screws better than glues,” and “If it snaps shut, it shall snap open.” In light of his stimulating talk, it is difficult not to see this as part of a constitution for zombie media.

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**Media Archaeology**

**Media Archaeology** is against “dead media.” Media may decay and rot, but they always come back from the dead.

**Media Archaeology** is opposed to planned obsolescence.

**Media Archaeology** is opposed to the “punctualization”—the “black-boxing”—of media and technology.

As an artistic methodology, **Media Archaeology** follows in the traditions of appropriation, collage, and remixing of materials and archives.

**Media Archaeology** is based upon the acknowledgement that re-use is an important dynamic of contemporary culture.