

April 23, 2009  
7 pm  
Carpenter Center for Visual Arts  
Harvard University



Cambridge  
Talks

**a media archaeology of boston**

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# A Media Archaeology of Boston

Description: *A Media Archaeology of Boston* is a one-night sound, film, and video exhibition that uses the Boston metropolitan region as a laboratory for exploring different modes of urban representation across history and various media.

Tonight's program presents an initial excavation of this city's spaces through a montage of short films, photographs, postcards, and experimental soundscapes recorded on-location in the larger metropolitan area. Far from a comprehensive survey, this presentation aims to provoke new senses of the city and challenge everyday perception.

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Preliminary  
Excavation  
Notebook

## Entry #1

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Title: Peter, Donald, Pat, Willie  
Directors: Mike Majoros and Jim Kaufman  
Date: 1989  
Original Format: 16mm

Description: Partially funded by The Friends of the Shattuck Shelter, the film follows the daily routines of four homeless men, their lives inside the shelter, and their relationship to the neighborhood of Jamaica Plain. The selected excerpt looks at Peter, an ex-hippie who lives out of other people's garbage. Called an urban archaeologist in the film, he collects trash to later sell at flea markets.

## Entry #2

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Title: Johnny Tremain and  
the Sons of Liberty  
Director: Robert Stevenson  
Date: 1958  
Original Format: 35mm

Description: Johnny Tremain is a feature film created by Walt Disney Corporation. The film was initially shot for television and later released to movie theaters. Based on Esther Forbes's novel *Johnny Tremain*, this historic epic aspires to convey the early stages of the American Revolution. In its opening sequence, the film features a one-to-one physical model of 18th century Boston.

## Entry #3

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Title: Seeing Boston  
Cinematographer: G.W. "Billy" Bitzer  
Date: 1906  
Original Format: 35mm photographic paper

Description: Later working with D.W. Griffith on films such as *Birth of a Nation*, G.W. Bitzer shot this film for the American Mutoscope & Biograph Company. On January 8, 1906 Bitzer boarded a streetcar in Boston and rode around wherever the vehicle took him. The camera moves from Tremont Street, to Washington St and the Jordan Marsch Department Store, to what is known today as Downtown Crossing, to Union Station (North Station), to the Boston Public Library and Copley Square.

## Entry #4

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Title: Met State  
Director: Bryan Papciak  
Date: 2001  
Original Format: 16mm

Description: *Met State* presents a portrait of the Metropolitan State Hospital in Waltham. Opened in 1930, the hospital ignited the public imagination and triggered a wide variety of ghostly legends. In 1992, the hospital was closed due to the broader deinstitutionalization movement. Bryan Papciak filmed the abandoned insane asylum over two years, deploying a variety of animation and film techniques.

## Entry #5

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Title: Boston Harbor/City/Islands  
Director: Derek Lamb  
Date: 1969  
Original Format: 16mm

Description: Known mostly as an animator and educator at Harvard University, Derek Lamb (1936-2005) was an academy award-winning filmmaker. This film aimed to document the “uses and abuses” of the Boston harbor. It was commissioned by the Massachusetts State Legislature and produced at MIT.

## Entry #6

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Title: Harbor/Bridges  
Artists: New England Phonographers Union  
Date: 2009  
Original Format: Digital audio

Description: The Boston metropolitan area consists of extensive waterfront and many roadways that cross water bodies. This piece combines sounds from the Long Wharf, the Charlestown bridge, and the Lynnway “singing” bridge.

## Entry #7

### Launching of the Salem at the Fore River Shipyards

Title:   
Cinematographer: ?   
Date: 1907   
Original Format: 35mm photographic paper

Description: Shows the Navy cruiser, the USS Salem, being launched at the Fore River Shipyards in Quincy, Mass., on July 27, 1907. Photographed from a single camera position, the first sequence shows the end of the ship and then its side as it slips down the ramp and into the water. Subsequent scenes pan the shoreline and the ship floating in the water. A tugboat and other small craft are also visible. This film was produced by Thomas A. Edison, Inc.

## Entry #8

### Industry on Parade: Ropewalk!

Title:   
Director: ?   
Date: 1950s   
Original Format: 16mm

Description: John Johnstone, the radio and television director of the National Association of Manufacturers, conceived the idea of a television program that would highlight the achievements of American Industry. "Industry on Parade" consisted of 13.5 minute-long episodes broadcast on NBC in the period between 1950 and 1960.

## Entry #9

Title: Welcome to Somerville  
Director: ?  
Date: 2004  
Original Format: ?

Description: Created by the City Government with local production studio Good Life Productions, this short video is used as a promotional tool to attract new development to Somerville.

## Entry #10

Title: Neighbors: Conversations in a Changing Neighborhood  
Director: Richard P. Rogers  
Date: 1977  
Original Format: 16mm

Description: Former Director of the Film Study Center and lecturer at S.U.N.Y. and Harvard University, Richard P. Rogers documents South End during the late 70s. The neighborhood was a testing ground for new practices of urban renewal, that aimed to restore historic buildings, instead of tear-down existing structures. The film illustrates the dynamics of a diverse place undergoing significant transformation.

## Entry #11

Title: The Blinking Madonna and Other Miracles  
Director: Beth Harrington  
Date: 1996  
Original Format: 35mm

Description: Filmmaker Beth Harrington moved to the North End and slowly became the neighborhood's documentarian. When locals believed that Harrington had captured a Madonna statue blinking, a series of events unfolded and the idea of a film emerged. The excerpt selected is early in the film, when Harrington first moves to the neighborhood and uses local residents as actors to comment on preconceptions of the North End.

## Entry #12

Title: Canoeing Scene  
Cinematographer: ?  
Date: 1901  
Original Format: 35mm photographic paper

Description: One of three early canoeing films taken along the Charles River between 1899 and 1904. The film belongs to the Paper Print Collection discovered in the Library of Congress. Due to early copyright laws that did not allow films to be copyright, filmmakers printed the negatives to 35mm photographic paper and submitted them to the Library of Congress. This film was produced by Thomas A. Edison, Inc.

## Entry #13

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Title: Boston the Way it Was  
Vol. 1  
Director: Lorie Conway  
Date: 1995  
Original Format: Beta tape

Description: *Boston the Way it Was — Vol. 1* was commissioned by WGBH for television broadcasting. The selected segment focuses upon Revere Beach at its peak, using archival footage from the 1940s. Designed by landscape architect Charles Eliot, Revere Beach opened in 1896 as the first public beach in the nation. Revere Beach used to feature the Cyclone, one of the most extreme rollercoasters in the US and a major attraction until its demolition in 1974.

## Entry #14

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Title: Postcards  
Artists: Tichnor Brothers  
Date: 1950s  
Original Format: Postcards

Description: A major publisher and printer of postcards, Tichnor Brothers Inc. was founded in Boston in 1912 and was sold in 1987 to another party who renamed it “Paper Majic.” The Tichnor Gloss series was notoriously retouched on a level that does not allow the postcards to claim either being photographs or paintings.

## Entry #15

### Boston Business Ads from the 1970s

Title:   
Directors: ?   
Date: 1970s   
Original Format: 35mm

Description: This reel of advertisements of local businesses was found as refuse footage in the projection booth of a local movie theater. The reel used to play in screening intermissions. Watch out for a blip during the third ad. Playing a joke on the audience, a local projectionist decided to insert a porno frame.

## Entry #16

### Exploration of Commercial Environments within Union Square

Title:   
Artists: New England Phonographers Union   
Date: 2009   
Original Format: Digital audio

Description: An edited analysis of nine indoor businesses in the heart of Union Square, Somerville. Equal time was spent in each locale, although this edited product gives focus to the most active moments, particularly music used to create a setting as well as customer and employee activity.

## Entry #17

### A Chinatown Banquet:

Title: Combat Zone  
Director: Mike Blockstein  
Date: 1999  
Original Format: DV Camera

Description: Created by Mike Blockstein along with the Asian Community Development Corporation and the Chinese Youth Initiative, *A Chinatown Banquet* consists of short snapshots of Boston's Chinatown. Using archival footage, the "Combat Zone" describes how the Chinatown community reacted to the transformation of the neighboring area into the city's red light district following the demolition of Scollay Square during urban renewal in the 1960s and new pornography legislation.

## Entry #18

### Railroad Smash-Up

Title: ?  
Cinematographer: ?  
Date: 1904  
Original Format: 35mm photographic paper

Description: This film was taken in Revere, Mass. and filmed from two different angles the staged collision of two outdated carriages. Onlookers paid to witness this dramatic spectacle. The cameraman was Edwin S. Porter who is best known as the cameraman of Edison's *Great Train Robbery*, filmed the previous December. This film was produced by Thomas A. Edison, Inc.

## Entry #19

Title: Boston Fire  
Director: Peter Hutton  
Date: 1979  
Original Format: 16mm

Description: In dialogue with the paintings of J.M.W. Turner, the experimental filmmaker Peter Hutton films a formless cloud of smoke arising from the city burning and the efforts of firemen to tame it.

## Entry #20

Title: BOSTON FIRE- roxbury mass  
house fire 1.22.04  
Director: tonytwister18  
Date: 2004  
Original Format: ?

Description: An example of YouTube's vast genre of disaster documentation, this video records a Roxbury house burning into flames.

## Entry #21

Title: Freedom of the American Road  
Director: ?  
Date: 1955  
Original Format: 35mm

Description: Sponsored by the Ford Motor Company, “Freedom of the American Road” is a propaganda film that frames its argument for new highway construction within the rhetoric of citizen activism. The two excerpts show Henry Ford II prefacing the film, followed by a “report” on the economic benefits that had been generated by the construction of Boston’s circumferential highway, Route 128.

## Entry #22

Title: Notes After Long Silence  
Director: Saul Levine  
Date: 1989  
Original Format: 8mm

Description: Using W.B. Yeats’ poem “After Long Silence” as a preliminary note, Saul Levine addresses film as a “sketchpad” for notetaking on the Vietnam War. The film uses footage of construction during the expansion of the Red Line from Harvard Square to Alewife during the early 1980s.

## Entry #23

Title: Lynn Massachusetts  
Panoramic View  
Cinematographer: ?  
Date: 1904  
Original Format: 35mm photographic paper

Description: From a single position, the camera pans Central Square in Lynn, Mass. Men, women, and children walk along the streets; a street car comes down one street, and a delivery wagon passes by. A couple of men hold placards, and a newspaper boy vends his wares. The pan ends at the railroad station; the gates lower to block the street, and a train pulls away from the depot. This film was produced by Thomas A. Edison, Inc.

## Entry #24

Title: The Perceptual Form of  
the City  
Researchers: Kevin Lynch, György Kepes, & Nishan  
Bichajian  
Date: 1954-59  
Original Format: Gelatin silver prints

Description: Funded by a five-year program grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, and within the auspices of the MIT Center for Urban and Regional Studies, Kevin Lynch launched this large-scale research initiative on the perceptual and physical form of the city. The work led to his seminal publication *The Image of the City*. Photographs presented are grouped according to the project's own categories.

## Entry #25

### Le Corbusier Designs for Harvard

Title: Le Corbusier Designs for Harvard  
Director: Bruce Seth Green  
Date: 1966  
Original Format: 16mm

Description: Commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art and directed by Bruce Seth Green from the College of Architecture at Cornell University, *Le Corbusier Designs for Harvard* explores film as a tool for architectural analysis and pedagogy. With the voiceover of Anthony Caputi, Professor of English Literature at Cornell, Seth Green, explores the idea of the *promenade architecturale* in the Carpenter Center.

## Entry #26

### Escalator Sound

Title: Escalator Sound  
Artists: New England Phonographers Union  
Date: 2009  
Original Format: Digital audio

Description: The Porter Square MBTA station contains the fifth-longest escalator run in the western hemisphere, with the four longer ones all in Washington, DC. This recording documents a ride from the bottom to the top.

## Entry #27

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Title: Panoramic View of Boston  
Subway from Electric Car  
Cinematographer: ?  
Date: 1901  
Original Format: 35mm photographic prints

Description: This film was taken on a short streetcar ride through a section of the Boston subway during its expansion towards Dorchester and Roxbury in 1901.

## Entry #28

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Title: The Next Karate Kid  
Director: Christopher Cain  
Date: 1994  
Original Format: 35mm

Description: *The Next Karate Kid*, the fourth film in the epic series, is set in metropolitan Boston. In addition to many shots of Mr. Miyagi's suburban colonial home, the film features a scene filmed at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority's Cabot Yard in South Boston. Erik, the train-guard, and Julie, the soon-to-be next karate kid, climb on a train that is still in service today. The ladder was added for the shoot.

## Credits

Lead Archaeologist #1: Jesse Shapins is interested in the intersection of media, subjectivity, and the city. His artistic works include *Yellow Arrow*, a global public art project combining stickers and mobile phones, and *The Colors of Berlin* (Prestel, 2005). He is co-founder of UnionDocs, a documentary arts collaborative in Brooklyn. Currently, he is pursuing a PhD in History and Theory of Urbanism, Film and Visual Studies at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design.

Lead Archaeologist #2: Olga Touloumi is a PhD student at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design. Her current research focuses on sound technologies, psychoacoustics, and theater architecture in the Post-World War II period. She holds a Master of Science in History, Theory, and Criticism of Architecture from MIT, and a professional degree in architecture from Greece. She has presented her work in *Thresholds* and other academic forums internationally.

Archaeologist #1: Lucien Castaing-Taylor's work in film and video seeks to conjugate the ambiguity and provocations of art with a documentary attachment to the immediate flux of lived experience. He is the Director of Harvard's Film Study Center and Sensory Ethnography Laboratory, and teaches in Visual & Environmental Studies and Anthropology.

Archaeologist #2: Ernst Karel works with analog electronics and with location recordings, sometimes separately, sometimes in combination, to create audio pieces that move between the abstract and the documentary. He manages the Sensory Ethnography Laboratory and the Film Study Center at Harvard.

Archaeologist #3: Julie Mallozzi is a documentary filmmaker who has taught filmmaking at Harvard and Massachusetts College of Art for twelve years.

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