The History of Now: Media Ecology and The News
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My apologies for not being able to attend this exciting conference, though I know my colleagues on this panel have delivered the real goods.

Thanks to Steve Anderson for delivering these brief remarks of introduction to my Scalar entry, entitled "The History of Now: Media Ecology and The News," which exists in dynamic relation to a more broadly conceived resource in development at Dartmouth.

The Media Ecology project is the title for this broader resource, and was initiated in May, 2008 in conjunction with the Mellon-funded Project Bamboo (which is working to develop digital resources to facilitate Humanities scholarship and teaching). The overall project goal is to utilize Web 2.0 and 3.0 features to develop a multi-disciplinary applied digital resource to facilitate the awareness of and critical study of Media Ecology. This work has proceeded in consultation with the Association of Moving Image Archivists, where this project has been met with enthusiasm.

"The History of Now" is an exploratory digital publication designed for the Scalar platform, which was initiated as part of the Vectors/IML/UCHRI NEH 2010 Summer Institute. It exists in dynamic relation to The Media Ecology Project, and is an invitation to encourage and develop a sense of mindfulness and critical reflection about the historical significance and historicized practices of broadcast news.

Two significant intended research and teaching outcomes are A) to underscore the significance of television news to the goal of an informed citizenry, and B) to better understand the role of television news regarding the mediation of society and its popular memory. Scholars such as Robert McChesney have suggested that the rise of the Internet

is one key factor in the collapse of commercial journalism in the U.S. The Media Ecology site would counter such an apparent correlation, by foregrounding the meta-criticism of journalism and journalism history via online capacities for access and collaboration.

What is presented on the "History of Now" site is a series of pages and paths that introduce critical terms and issues regarding the study of historical newscasts. This is intended to encourage new work by both archivists and scholars to facilitate and develop this crucial area of study. Within television studies and media studies more generally, theoretically-informed reflections often precede and frame significant archival and historicized research. This site encourages dynamic new work across this continuum, and the production of increasingly rich databases to relate texts, metadata, and contexts in newly expressive relations (via Scalar).

The homepage offers a selection of representative case studies (e.g., various rare examples of early local television news), situated via Scalar in relation to pathways that afford both historically specific and historiographically conceptual contexts. Among these contexts, for example, are categories of electronic representation (liveness; real time) that delineate a claim to indexicality in relation to mediation, but upon historical reflection can be understood to also demarcate complex and situational ontologies of representation.

Another path renders a key denotative term in the legacy of electronic news—the notion of a "flash," short for "newsflash" or wire service headline—in terms of a more connotative trope of representation (visible flashes of light), that raises awareness about spectacle and desire in the news. This nuance of image content is echoed in the deployment of Scalar tool functionality, in that the path is constructed as a string of annotations across media files. The pathway realizes in a modest way the promise of new scholarship in such enriched publishing platforms to yield newly expressive registers of the archive in database form—to work toward realizing the archive as an expressive "body" in itself.

The site is of course a work in progress, such that its conceptual and expressive registers

continue to evolve. This evolution is fundamentally dependent upon more and better access to archival resources, in conjunction with the flexibility of the Scalar platform. If there is one governing principle that has emerged as a focus for the site, it is the complex temporal registers that figure and determine the conditional relations between and across such concepts as news, history, "live", archive, duration, memory, the timely, and the untimely. Indeed, the evident next stage of development on the site will be an enhanced attention to theoretical work on the concept of the interval (for example in the theories of Dziga Vertov, and their significance to database theorists such as Lev Manovich), and the development of methods of analysis that pursue the dynamics of what we might call the critical interval in media ecology studies.

This famous aphorism serves as an introductory context for the site:

> History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time,
> but time filled by the presence of the now.
>
> > Walter Benjamin, in "Theses"

By invoking the seeming contradiction of a history of the now, which implicitly foregrounds the constructedness of modalities of "presence" and present-ness, this project intends a conceptual and practical expansion of the study of historical newscasts. Affording access to a range of historical news media texts, via "new media" and real-time digital environments, the site is structured to enable our capacities to critically engage with the media texts themselves (in historicized inter-medial contexts) but also their existence within database and online archives. In this way the site can be seen to help render an enhanced critical awareness about the news today and yesterday, and the complex significance of this critical awareness to the very means of access to these important but understudied media discourses. These complexities are afforded an augmented expressivity via Scalar.

Link to the site:
http://vectorsjournal.org/scalar/nehvectors/williams/index