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Blurriness in Media Art Archiving Where Theory Encounters Practice, the Archive of Digital Art (ADA)[1]

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Abstract

Due to its border-transgressing, fast-paced nature, and recalcitrance for clear-cut characterizations, media art has occupied the minds of art researchers, theorists, and archivists for many years. Today, particularly regarding questions of its documentation, there is a multitude of positions, approaches, and concepts produced in different contexts—academic, institutional, or from within the art scene itself. Of course, this vivid discourse signals the importance of the art form. Nevertheless, one could wonder if this circumstance adds to the field's elusiveness and how it affects the hands-on activity of archiving. Based on our work with the online platform Archive of Digital Art (ADA), we want to share our practical experiences of media art archiving in the digital realm and interweave it with some theoretical considerations. Is there any space for blurriness? And if so, is it a daunting or a productive trait? Naturally, we are advocating for the latter… but it could also be a matter of perspective.

Keywords: archives; media art; digital humanities; digital archiving; archive theory; media art theory; image analysis

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It has been mentioned on numerous accounts that the field of media art holds a special position compared to traditional art forms. Some of the reasons include that it is usually referred to for its process orientation, employment of manifold techniques, materials, and strategies from a variety of disciplines and knowledge bases, or its fast-paced nature, which seems inherent in light of rapid technological developments and their equally fast incorporation in the artistic practices. Hence, characterizations often emphasize its elusiveness to clear-cut definition, e.g., describing it as "transient" or even "ontologically exponentially complex" (Ernst, *Digital Memory* 90; Saba 101).

Perhaps then, it seems fair to speak of a certain "blurriness" immanent to the domain of media art, a thought we want to elaborate in this paper. Our aim is to see if and how this "blurriness" translates into our work of digitally archiving this art form on the platform Archive of Digital Art (ADA, www.digitalartarchive.at). Therefore, in this section, we will look at two examples to illustrate why media art is so hard to pin down and discuss some theoretical viewpoints that problematize archiving this art of our time. In the second section, we will present ADA and its core idea of collaborative archiving, an approach already emanating from the intricacies of the media art field, its blurriness if you will, e.g., its diverse and dispersed community that is nevertheless highly interconnected. The third segment presents important tools to navigate and analyze the archive content, namely the Bridge Thesaurus and the viewing application Light Box. Stemming from previous projects they are the fundament for the next steps to further engage archive visitors. Before concluding on the role of blurriness for our practical work, we will present our current ideas on digital archiving in the section "Toward Playfulness." For now, let's continue with a few more words on blurriness in media art (archiving).

Seeing as today we hold efficiency in high regard, blurriness could be mistaken as undesirable, something that needs to be dealt with as quickly as possible. While this is surely an oversimplification, particularly with respect to media art, quite the opposite might hold true. In fact, one could argue that it is its most captivating feature, allowing for the right amount of nimbleness and flexibility to transgress boundaries when and wherever necessary. Isn't this an eminently suitable quality fitting to the increasing complexity of our time, which constantly calls for transdisciplinary approaches to explore new paths?

There is sufficient evidence of the diversity in media art. However, it is always helpful to establish examples, which can be brought up throughout the text to illustrate our points. For instance, artists like Adam Harvey or the collective *Forensic Architecture* blur the lines between the categories of art, research, activism, and journalism in their modus operandi. Works like *VFRAME* (2017–ongoing), a project that develops state-of-the-art computer vision tools for human rights research and conflict zone monitoring, are not only intrinsically procedural but appear in vastly different contexts such as art exhibitions and specific applications for detecting war crimes, thereby presenting themselves as investigative instruments that are meant to be used and as art objects alike. *Forensic Architecture* is an interdisciplinary team of architects, designers, artists, engineers, journalists, filmmakers, software developers, and other professionals that investigates armed conflicts, environmental destruction, or abuse of state power; their results are also frequently conveyed in art shows. Both cases depict how previous borders among different areas of expertise are eroding. Indeed, it is easy to imagine somebody questioning whether this is art at all or at least asserting that it should instead be subsumed under

research, activism, or journalism. Nevertheless, the fact is, they are widely recognized, especially in the media art sphere, where they each received distinguished awards.[2]

If the "blurriness" of media art—understood as its ephemerality and eclecticism of influences, methods, materials, and wide range of interests—already makes it tough to delineate in a straightforward way, it can be no surprise that it expands further into some major questions about its preservation for future generations. What does it entail to properly preserve a process-driven, modular, and materially as well as technologically diverse art form? What are adequate tools, methods, and intellectual foundations? The limitations of traditional online and offline archiving strategies in this respect have been mentioned on several occasions and often underline concerns about a reduction in loss of meaning or the general danger of losing culturally significant artworks because of missing resources and appropriate standards (Saba 102; Grau, "Our Digital Culture" 40). Although physical and digital archiving of media art share a couple of issues, there are also important distinctions between them, first and foremost that the former also deals with maintaining material objects and their functionality. Here, we primarily focus on implications, possibilities, and hands-on practices of the latter.

A frequent matter of discussion is the notion of originality in artworks, or rather the continuing disassembly thereof. Granted, this debate has been going on for some time and has gained a lot of traction since Walter Benjamin's famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935). Nevertheless, it reaches another level in the digital context, where originality is regularly obscured, for example, when proclaiming the "final abandonment of the idea of originality in artistic work, since every digitalization process gradually undermines the presence of the source" (Saba 105). In contrast, Hal Foster adds, for consideration, that—

[2] *Forensic Architecture* and *VFRAME* both won the prestigious Prix Ars Electronica in 2021 and 2019, respectively.

along the lines of André Malraux, who was in contact with Benjamin at the time of writing—reproduction can also "locate" and "construct" originality, rather than only disintegrating it (91). Maybe one should be careful of abandoning originality just yet, seeing how recent philosophy, namely Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), starts placing an emphasis on the integrity of objects again, also paying explicit attention to aesthetics and works of art (Harman, *Art + Objects*). Far from taking a firm stance on one side or the other, we contend that this tension is a very productive substrate for novel perspectives. For blurriness to occur there have to be (at least) two extremes, in this case the opposing conceptualizations of originality in terms of realism and postmodernism. It originates in between the neatly expressed models of thought, there they start to melt, there they become moldable and allow for creativity. OOO is an interesting case as they position (art) objects in between realism and postmodernism by tackling ontological premises.

Another problem, which subverts the finitude of media art pieces and raises serious ramifications for their preservation, is the increasing subordination of artworks to context and process. This typically involves stressing the dynamics of meaning based on situations on the one hand and the procedural openness as a result of constant physical or digital transformations on the other (Saba 104–7; Grau et al., "Documenting Media Art" 436). Those are undeniably good arguments but potentially traumatic for archivists; if it is unclear when or where artworks end, it makes the decision about what should be archived to reflect the (unknown) whole notoriously difficult. The above-mentioned examples illustrate the dilemma: What exactly should be archived in the case of *VFRAME*? Only the core idea of using advanced commercial machine learning technologies to uncover human rights violations? Or every single version of the ongoing project, from a tool for film analysis to monitor online content during the Syrian civil war, to detecting a particular cluster munition in the Ukraine war? Or the program codes?

What about information on the intricate and ever-advancing methods they employ or about the context of the conflict they were developed for? Of course, similar questions apply to *Forensic Architecture* and other works of media art. With context and process in the foreground, they are no longer seen as discrete entities in space and time but as enmeshed in the universal relation of things. Unfortunately, figuring out the needs for archiving becomes infinitely harder then.

In addition, the language to describe and categorize artworks in the field is remarkably fluid; falling back on established vocabulary for art like the Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT) is only a partial option. Once more, the transitory character of media art, its trait of curiosity for different knowledge forms and up-to-datedness as to the latest societal developments and technical inventions, is a considerable cause that contributes to the "dynamic terminology" and constant "proliferation of terms" (Grau et al., "Documenting Media Art" 436; Saba 106–7).

The Archive of Digital Art (ADA) and a Story of Gains and Losses in Media Art Archiving

Founded in 1999, the Archive of Digital Art (ADA) is one of the pioneering web platforms for the documentation of media art, and it is still operating and being developed (see fig. 1). During its 23 years a considerable number of researchers, artists, scholars, and affiliates contributed to its evolution, either devoting themselves to its infrastructural side by developing new features and reshaping its design, etc., or by adding to the content side of the database.[3] In a way, its vivid history mirrors some of the topics of archiving media art. As the platform itself grows organically over time, certain parts can become blurry, especially for members outside of the editorial team. In an intriguing undertaking, our technician, much like a media archeologist, uncovered the page's former graphical appearances as well as the technologies applied in the

[3] We sincerely thank all the colleagues who put their efforts into the evolution of the Archive of Digital Art.

past. Not without a sense of irony, the remaining uncertainty was: Can the archivers archive the archive comprehensively? What other stages of the platform's evolution could be brought to attention again? This manner of questioning raises awareness that on top of all its intricacies and shifting needs, ADA very much underlies the rapid transitions of technological standards itself. Keeping up is a big task and requires many skill sets, from technicians to designers to data analysts to archivists. In this multidisciplinary, dynamic, contextual, and procedural nature, media art strikingly resembles its archiving. But the more significant implication here is that viewing these characteristics from a certain angle, the notion of loss will always be predominant in (media) art preservation. This sort of critical inquiry sometimes serves its purpose when looking for certain answers, e.g., when looking for biases. But it can be a dark, exhausting kind of blurriness. Instead, we also want to underpin a kinder, lighter, more playful blurriness, if you will, one that leans on what can be gained rather than what could be lost. In the case of ADA, how much the project has evolved and gained since its initiation is clearly visible.

One main strategy of the archive is the attention to cultivating a collective documenting space for a community as rich as the art form itself. Today, the site lists events of about 900 media art institutions, providing an overview of past and present activities for the scene. Moreover, the archive encompasses over 4,000 artworks, more than 10,000 digital documents, and approximately 1,000 artists, as well as scholars who actively participate in the growth and vibrancy of the platform. Since the media art world is relatively decentralized—produced in many countries but coming together only for a handful of big festivals, e.g., Ars Electronica, or in a few other exhibition settings—media art can't rely on a dense network of institutions for preservation as for other fine arts. Hence, to reach a more comprehensive level of documentation, accessibility to the database is a key condition, which ADA ensures by allowing

artists and scholars to upload their own information. However, as a quality measurement, a gatekeeping policy requires them to have at least five exhibitions or published articles.

Fig 1. *Archive of Digital Art (ADA),* new front page in a minimalistic design (under development). © Center for Image Science, University for Continuing Education Krems.

In a way this approach reflects and creatively reacts to the blurriness of the media art sphere, especially if you consider the application of a fairly new technology to document a fairly new and diverse field—collectively—back in 1999. This approach also has implications for the previously mentioned issues. So, let's start with the openness of media art rooted in its processuality and context dependence, making it elusive for documentation. To complicate things, there is a widespread view that, basically, the archive is a social place determined by historical and institutional power relations; in other words, archiving is never a neutral act (Ricoeur 167; Foucault 129). So, put bluntly, the threats of misrepresentation linger on both

sides: within the art and the archive. We certainly can't get around the fact that there is an administered framework behind ADA. It is simply necessary for the required consistency and quality of a database used in scientific and artistic contexts. Still, the overall aim is to facilitate access for people and also equip them with a considerable amount of freedom wherever possible. For instance, compared to traditional archives, where professionals individually select additions, the gatekeeping guideline is nonetheless an acceptable threshold for contributors and fits the globally dispersed structure of artists and scholars in the field. Additionally, normal visitors who are not community members can explore the database independently and are not subjected to the usual tight set of rules of physical archives that can create a barrier. Another example is the entry mask for uploaders; documents representing artists and scholars are predefined based on the concept of "expanded documentation" (Grau, "For an Expanded Concept" 2–15). They include a personal profile with biographical and bibliographical information, awards, inventions, statements, events, exhibitions, works, and publications. Artworks are presented on individual pages with a description, graphic images, video documents, sound files, schematics, technical data, references, literature, and information about institutions and copyright. Although there are defined input sections, artists have ample room to individualize their content. This means that it is up to the artists to decide how the artwork should be documented, e.g., which materials—images, sketches, articles, technical plans, etc.—are fundamental to its presentation, and whether, returning to *VFRAME*, the project should be featured either as one entry, or many entries for each of the artwork's versions.

Last but not least, contributors can also choose from a controlled keyword system to tag their work accordingly. These and other factors on ADA sum up to an innovative and appropriate model for archiving media art in our interconnected twenty-first century, making it a combined

effort of invested people. They blur the image of classic preservation, instead replacing it with a more democratic, collaborative, and procedural practice. However, it must be stressed again that an administrative body is in the background. Hence, balancing a wide degree of autonomy for users, our valuable external archivers, and the underlying architecture to keep the data coherent is one of the critical challenges for the editorial team. The archive is indeed largely a social place, but with ADA, the intention is to shake the institutional confines and open it to the community as far as possible. In this way, context and processuality are extended to the act of archiving and the representation of artworks becomes a shared responsibility.

But let us turn to the matter of originality, an idea that, as mentioned before, is frequently abandoned due to the impact of reproduction techniques, especially in the digital age. Together with the vagueness of media art and the systemic impossibility for archiving institutions to be unbiased, it seems the discourse revolves heavily around the concept of loss, emphasizing the gap integral to the realm of preservation. While this line of thought indubitably brings relevant facets to the table, the attention to what can be gained might be just as beneficial. Without reaching a conclusion, Hal Foster asks if the archival relation allowed by electronic information shatters both tradition and aura of artworks or, speaking in terms of Malraux, permits the fostering of ever more "stylistic affinities" and "artistic values" (93). We have no answer either, whether reproduction and digitalization increase or diminish the relevance of originality. The rising popularity and visitor records of museums may suggest the former.[4] But except for digital-born artworks, ADA is not in the business of preserving originals. Despite that, every entry to the database can be considered a sovereign yet potentially extensible digital object. Thus, if an artist

[4] The popularity of museums was rising before COVID-19; now they seem to bounce back fairly well ("Popularity of Museums"; da Silva).

decides to edit an entry, it would still go back to being a self-contained object once they are finished.[5] This subtle shift to the "open finitude" of objects gives less weight to the insufficiencies in media art archiving, which direct the attention to achieve the unachievable by trying to grip what slips but opens up, with a kind of playfulness and curiosity, what the possibilities of this technological frame are and how these finite objects can be extended and (re)combined for exploration. In short, we concentrate less on problematizing the completeness of archived objects but ask what can be gained with them in the digital setting. Again, highlighting the loss is also an indispensable, valid angle when thinking about archiving standards for media art. It is likewise a reality that media artworks are lost because of a lack of funding and institutional hurdles (Grau, "Our Digital Culture" 40–2). But the question of what can be gained is equally essential for our work with ADA.

Corresponding to the suggested playfulness in the digital dimension, Wolfgang Ernst sees the electronic archive as "interactive," "time-critical to user feedback," and defined by "generative agency," noting further that the "traditional classificatory indexing (by metadata) is replaced by dynamic (though still rule-governed, protocol-governed) sorting" ("The Archive as Metaphor" 50). We could not agree more. In the case of ADA, the blurry part that sparks experimentation is twofold: firstly, how we can advance the empowerment of members while being transparent about governing rules and protocols. The last part is vital as there are abundant bad examples in the social media environment. And secondly, how we can improve users'

[5] This understanding of an object is inspired by Graham Harman (OOO). In his view objects are constantly neglected due to "under- or overmining," meaning they are either reduced downwards to their components (e.g., particles) or upwards to relations (e.g., networks). He argues for the autonomy of objects, which interact based on their qualities (*Speculative Realism* 91−122). In this sense, the digital representation of an artwork is independent from the artwork; as autonomous objects, they nevertheless interact.

engagement with the documented material, or more precisely, what applications and modes of browsing through the archive are advantageous to support creativity.

First Step to Interaction: Bridge Thesaurus and Light Box

Strengthening the communal sense and promoting interexchange on the database has been paramount for previous project teams, a spirit that is crucial for us to sustain, too. With this aim in mind, an array of functions has been introduced to the platform in the past, e.g., several Web 2.0 features like personal messaging, allowing for easy communication among members or the possibility of following the recent activities of other people. Also, the latest news and uploads are openly visible to the community. But two of the most significant steps in the endeavor to transform ADA into an interactive archive were the implementations of the first versions of the Bridge Thesaurus and Light Box from 2012 to 2016. They are both focal points for our current plans to investigate playfulness in a digital archiving environment, extract meaningful knowledge from existing data, and develop helpful tools to delve into the growing content on the website.

Arranged in four top hierarchies—"aesthetics," "subject," "genre," and "technology"—the controlled vocabulary of the Bridge Thesaurus offers around 600 keywords for contributors to index their works with the matching linguistic descriptors. Being precise in this process improves specificity, findability, and exactness of the general categorization scheme. Moreover, it adds meaningful meta information for researchers, for example, when looking for artworks that are similar in style, use of technology, etc. Nonetheless, it is roughly limited to the above number of terms to give a comprehensive overview of relevant terminology in media art while at the same time being convenient to work with for content creators. Sitting at the heart of ADA's classificatory approach, a considerable part relies on the accuracy of uploading artists and

scholars. Therefore, it is pivotal to maintain the Thesaurus well and keep it up to date with emerging expressions in the knowledge domain. This can be a tricky task, as in the fast-moving media art field, descriptive terms evolve as quickly as they vanish. There is no conventional standard to adhere to. However, there are promising initiatives like the newly published *Ontology for Media Art* by the Finnish Media Art Network (OMA). Should a terminology prevail in the future, it would be an invaluable step that could enable an in-depth connection between archiving platforms not only based on names of artists and artworks but semantic layers as well. At a small scale, which reveals the possibilities of semantic comparative analysis, this has been achieved with the Bridge Thesaurus. Via the vocabulary, it connects the databases of ADA and the Göttweig Abbey Graphic Collection, one of Austria's largest private collections of engravings with approximately 30,000 prints, primarily from the Baroque and Renaissance period.[6] Linking these archives facilitates comparative, trans-historical, cross-cultural, and transdisciplinary art research by bringing together artworks from different historical and social contexts through the tagging system (Grau et al., "Documenting Media Art" 439). The Bridge Thesaurus, with its controlled vocabulary, is a powerful and copious source for researching the archive material. Our intention is to investigate its potential further and make it available to the users, one of the latest outcomes being a sunburst visualization of individual artists' keyword profiles (see fig. 2).

The Light Box is an online viewing tool that encourages comparative visual analysis of archive content. The core idea is based on the name given to the viewing device for analog film negatives by providing a framework for preview and comparison purposes. It functions as a

[6] In cooperation with Göttweig, the Department of Image Science at the University for Continuing Education Krems also conducted the digitization of the collection in an earlier project (GSSG).

panel onto which material can be attached and arranged. As a logged-in user, it is possible to highlight ADA content while browsing through the archive to form a collection of material that can be loaded into the Light Box tool later. In the Light Box tool, visitors can individually arrange multiple artworks alongside descriptive information, keywords, available metadata, and additional materials provided by the artists. Several functions are provided to perform analysis and comparison: At the moment, the visual material can be scaled, zoomed in, and "overlapped" to facilitate a detailed comparison of images (see fig. 3).

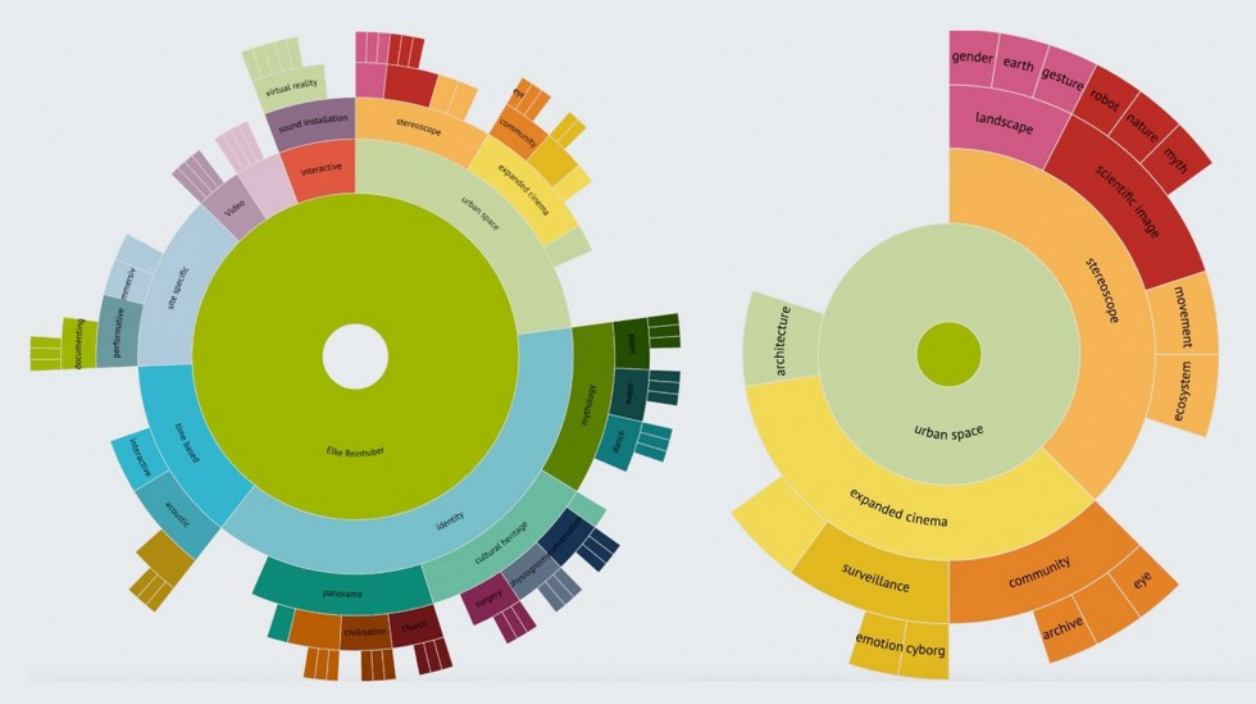

Fig 2. *Keyword profiles* give an overview of the artists based on the prevalence of tags they chose for their artworks (here Elke Reinhuber). Visualization by Michael Perl, © Center for Image Science, University for Continuing Education Krems.

Different versions of the working panel can be saved for later alterations and even published, for instance, in the framework of online exhibitions. The potential of this feature is not fully unrolled yet. To enhance the scholarly and social features of the Light Box, we are working on the expansion of its functionality to meet both the need for a viewing device and a community portal. A basic goal is to bring the two-dimensional plane of the Light Box into the third dimension: to develop the light table into a luminous space, which blurs the borders between analysis and contemplation. The source code of the newly developed Light Box tool will be released in an open-source context as the collaborative spirit of the global web development community fits to our ideals.

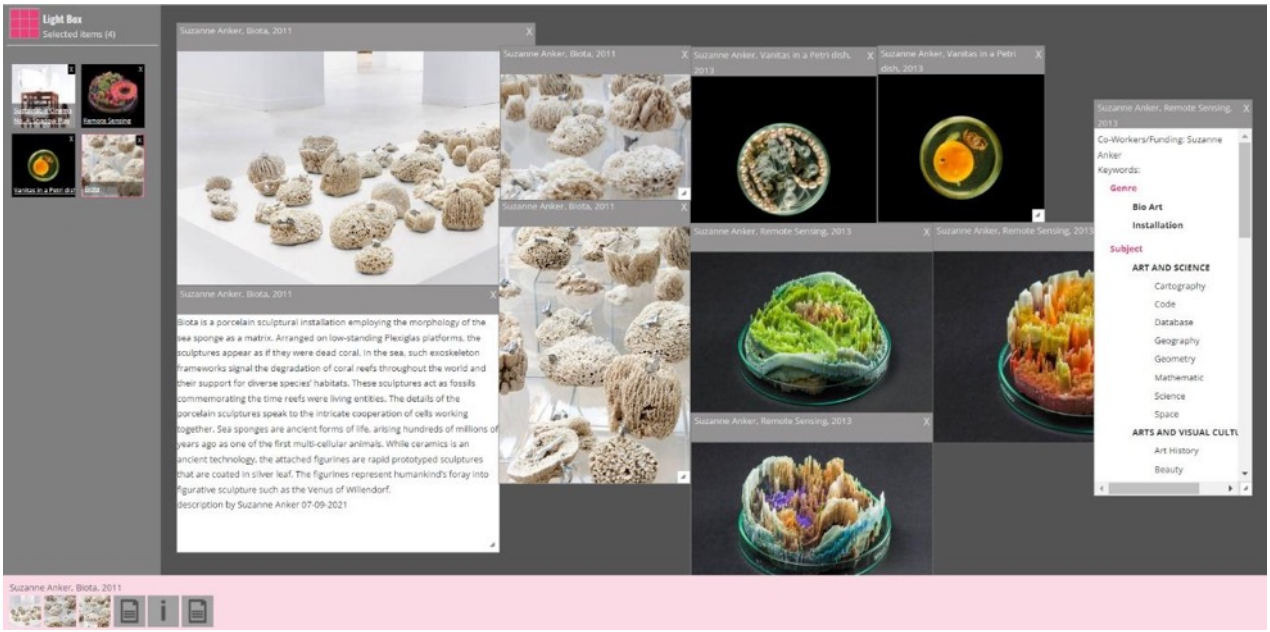

Fig 3. *Light Box,* image comparison tool (current version). © Center for Image Science, University for Continuing Education Krems.

Seeing the exciting paths that have been opened with all the former steps on ADA, administrative decisions, the incorporation of applications, and many other factors that resulted

in its broader orientation dedicated to collaboration, community, and exposing fresh knowledge, we want to keep up this enthusiasm for exploring uncharted areas and build on the excellent cornerstones that have already been laid. Our task is now not merely to develop or advance interactive tools to (re)combine the "open finitude" objects from the archive but to ask how we can connect them synergistically.

Toward Playfulness

If the blurriness surrounding media art inspires experimental techniques and strategies in archiving, then, in order to focus on what can be gained instead of solely retained, we see playfulness as a promising mode of interaction arising from it. In that sense, we understand a mode of interaction that fosters openness to inspiration, to go with the flow, to reevaluate aesthetic judgment, and to reveal bias and presumption.

In fact, a somewhat playful approach to dealing with visual material in the context of art history was introduced in the 1920s by Aby Warburg in the shape of his *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* (1924–1929, unfinished). By seemingly loosely arranging different images side by side, Warburg was aiming to expose themes and correspondences throughout Western visual culture—from Antiquity via Renaissance to modernity—by exploring reciprocal influences between text and images and, by doing so, relying on the prolific tension between perception and apperception. With regard to Lena Bader, the state of the introduced vision could be seen as constitutively dynamic as, on the one hand, ever new meanings are created and interconnections made possible, and, on the other hand, a dialogic relation between the viewer and the material is established. Furthermore, Bader highlights the playfulness of this visual argumentation ("wo Formen *und* Blicke anfangen zu spielen," Bader 44) and the productivity of knowledge gain. The viewers find themselves wandering about a scope of visual experience and mutable contemplation, embarking

on a timeless, trans-historical journey embracing ambiguity and, hence, blurriness. Johnson accordingly states about Warburg that "if his juxtaposition of images and panels self-consciously flirts with anachronism, then this is because Warburg believed that humanity, in fact, was forever oscillating between extremes of emotion and reason" (11).

As shown, Warburg's method of comparative analysis enabled a new vision, a kaleidoscopic view that is mainly characterized by a nonlinear, time-based assessment of a collection of images set side by side, advocating for a very distinct form of perceptual knowledge gained in the framework of cultural studies (Johnson 11). Furthermore, it enables transdisciplinary and transmedia analysis and makes it possible to apply the depicted concept of blurriness to involve media art and its phenomena into close reading. Warburg's "blurry vision" is playful as it is pleasurable, process-oriented, it is immersive, and yet tied to the here and now. It highlights the qualities of the aesthetic experience. Thus, we would like to plead for an aesthetic of multiplicity and differences, of heterogeneity and amazement when it comes to media art archiving and analysis.

In conjunction with the reflection upon media art archiving, we can gain from Warburg's concept of a "blurry vision" as it brings to light the main characteristics of media art that in traditional archiving contexts pose a challenge and possibly a threat. This means, for instance, its ephemeral nature, its interactive characteristic, and its exceptional relation to time and space. As Wolfgang Ernst argues, the spatial dimension of the archive transforms into a temporal dimension as the dynamization of the digital archive involves time-based procedures, which makes it possible for us to shift the focal point from the archival data to the archival experience. Since the dynamic temporal storage of digital archives is a place of permanent data transfer and, therefore, a sphere of ever new configurations and constellations, a sphere of constant change, it

gives way to link the idea of a playful "blurry" vision to the experience of the archive ("The Archive as Metaphor" 48).

Just as Aby Warburg accomplished in the framework of his *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Walter Benjamin formed a metaphoric archaeology of modernity with his *Passagen-Werk,* "for it, too, collects history's artifacts to furnish a now material" (Johnson x). Just like the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, Benjamin's unfinished *Passagen-Werk* proposes a playful mode to comprehend contemporary phenomena, to indulge in an unfiltered stream of associations and impressions. Experiencing the transformation of Paris into a metropolis, Walter Benjamin noted the disruptive force of the flâneur, who somehow defies the modern inclination to efficiency and growth with his seemingly random act of strolling, while really being a keen observer with an "illustrative vision" (Benjamin 528). Benjamin's concept of the flâneur as a pleasure-driven figure that wanders about in time and space gives way to an adapted, playful concept of exploration, to which we aim to offer appropriate tools. Therefore—coming back to ADA and to the adaption and development of archival tools—our online tool development circles around the idea of bringing the "blurriness" of media art into congruence with the potential of an associative and illustrative vision (Warburg, Benjamin) to create an environment for media art exploration.

Hence, we ask ourselves what it could mean to "flâner" through an online archive and how digital tools could enable it. Based on the assumption that research questions are often either extremely specific or—in light of big datasets and computational capabilities—take a meta-perspective, we propose that to "flâner" could act in the in-between. It should provoke both artists and researchers to playfully (re)combine archive material, thereby uncovering unexpected connections, oddities, and stimulating questions for further exploration. Consequently, the question is not merely what single tools are provided for visitors but also how well they are

integrated in order to provide a multitude of access points and routes through an online archive environment.

In the course of our research project, the idea of "flâner" allows us to conceptually intertwine the existing tools for visual analysis (Light Box) on the one hand and semantic analysis (Bridge Thesaurus) on the other. As our focus lies on adequate methods for documenting, analyzing, and creatively engaging with works in the field of media art as well as expanding the community feature of the existing online platform, the application of immersive web technologies meets both objectives. For example, the open-source tool Collectionscope would be ideal for connecting it to the Thesaurus, allowing visitors to sort and combine image content based on the controlled vocabulary, which could then be moved to the Light Box for

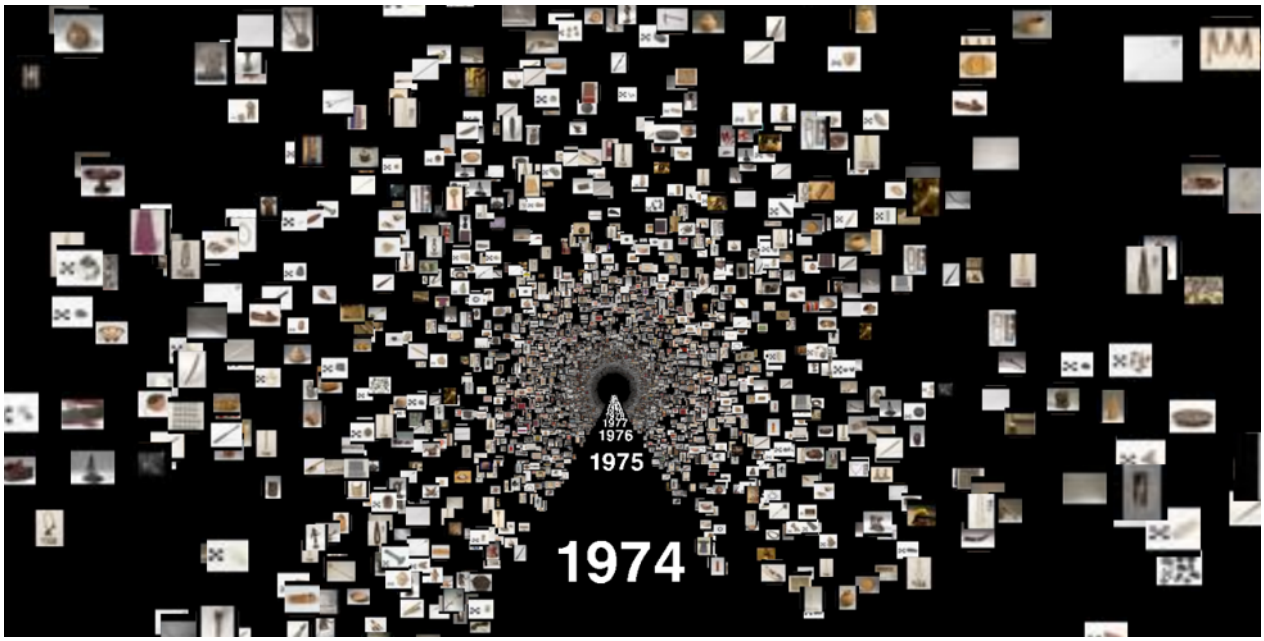

Fig 4. *Collectionscope*, visualization tool. © Supported by The Knight Foundation, built by the American Museum of Natural History, Science Visualization Group.

further analysis (see fig. 4). Ultimately, our goal is to create an archive environment that permits the user to seamlessly transit between the spheres of browsing and close analysis, thereby allowing the mode of interaction with the archive to change fluidly.

Conclusion

In this article we elaborated on the idea of blurriness as a determining quality of media art culture, from its multifarious community to its experimentative stance mirrored in its ability to adapt to new technologies and its proneness to transgress disciplinary borders. Our argument is that this trait translates into the field of (digitally) documenting media art where it promotes exploration. We backed our argument with practical examples from ADA starting with its collaborative approach and ending with our current concept of playfulness. With regard to theoretical standpoints that focus on loss, we wanted to illustrate that in our view the digital realm facilitates (re)combination and expansion to gain novel insights and aesthetic approaches. After all, context and processuality add to the richness of artworks, but they arise from letting different, autonomous objects interact and touch. We hold that one shouldn't get too hung up on what cannot be archived to a full extent, but to create context and continue the process with what is given—in case of ADA that is what the artists share by uploading.

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