

Media Archaeology and Art: An Exploration **MAST** of Past, Present, and Future

Maryam Muliæe

University at Buffalo, USA

Media archaeology and art intersect in many compelling ways, creating a rich tapestry of interaction that provides unique opportunities to explore, reinterpret, and reinvent media technologies through the lens of historical and contemporary practices. With its focus on uncovering, analyzing, and re-contextualizing forgotten, obsolete, and overlooked media technologies, media archaeology offers artists a wide repository of materials and ideas. Artists repurpose and remake old and new technologies in parallel lines, and their works can provide fresh perspectives on the present by reflecting on the past. By delving into the past and its discarded technologies, media archaeological art uncovers the layers and trajectories that have influenced modern media landscapes. This excavation not only brings to light the hidden histories of media evolution but also generates alternative narratives to our contemporary media consumption and technological determinism.

Art contributes to media archaeology by materializing theoretical concepts and historical insights into tangible forms. Art's use of media archaeological techniques and approaches breathes new life into our understanding of historical media forms, reevaluating their cultural and technological impacts in the present time. Artists interpret the findings of media archaeology, transforming them into visual, auditory, and interactive experiences that communicate complex

ideas in accessible and emotionally resonant ways. This transformation is crucial, as it extends the reach of media archaeological research beyond academic circles, engaging a broader audience and sparking discussions on the implications of media development and its socio-cultural impacts. Conversely, media archaeology, informed by artistic approaches and techniques, leads to new insights and theories about media, their material-technical properties, and their socio-cultural roles.

The symbiosis between media archaeology and art is essential because it enriches each field by stimulating critical discourse around the implications of media technologies in everyday use. Through artistic interpretations of media archaeological research, the public is invited to reflect on the role of media in shaping human perception and cultural norms. Moreover, the integration of media archaeology and art contributes to the sustainability of media heritage. By repurposing obsolete technologies into new artistic forms, artists ensure these technologies' continued relevance, preventing them from disappearing into obscurity. This not only preserves the history embedded within these media forms but also promotes ecological sustainability by reusing and recycling electronic waste.

Practice lies at the core of media archaeology. Although the discipline has gained widespread recognition through the academic literature, it is most vividly manifested when artists and practitioners engage with its concepts. This engagement gives rise to 'media archaeological art,' a crucial term that captures the integration of the old and the new when historical media objects and practice techniques are incorporated into contemporary creations and artistic expressions.

The genesis of media archaeology, as Erkki Huhtamo argues, can be traced back to artists' studios and media labs, settings where practical engagements preceded theoretical

documentation. In one of his seminal works, Huhtamo elaborates on "archaeologically inclined media artists" such as Jeffrey Shaw, Toshio Iwai, Paul De Marinis, Ken Feingold, Lynn Hershman, Perry Hoberman, Michael Naimark, Catherine Richards, and Jill Scott, among others, whom he calls "artist-archaeologists." (4) Huhtamo identifies two main features in media archaeological art: first, it exhibits the repeating motives and elements of media that return in the course of media culture development, and second, it explores how these recurring motives reappear in new forms (4). In Huhtamo's definition, media archaeological art is like "a spatialized, conversational 'historical writing'" akin to "time machines" that allow viewers to navigate temporality through "cyclical rather than linear" paths. (2-3) In this sense, media archaeological art transcends moving "simply up and down the shaft of time, as if encapsulated in a chronographic elevator." Instead, it navigates through a multidimensional space where temporal layers—past, present, and future—interact and overlap. Here, what media artist-archeologist does is not just recounting history but engaging in a dialogue with the technological past, where the understanding of time beyond simple chronological recount is enriched. As Huhtamo writes,

The gaze of the media artist, earlier directed primarily towards the future, has now been supplanted, or rather supported, by another one which faces the past. [...] Yet, although the gaze of the media archeologist faces the past it is not fixed; rather, it is extremely mobile. It scans incessantly the historical panorama of technocultural forms, moving back and forth in time, looking for correspondences and points of rupture. In the end, it (re)turns to the present, and eventually, the future. (3)

In his seminal book, *What Is Media Archaeology?*, Jussi Parikka delineates media archaeological art into six thematic categories. This classification helps us understand the varied ways in which

artists engage with media artifacts and technologies to explore and reinterpret their historical and cultural contexts. These themes include: artworks that engage with historical themes; those that present alternative histories, challenging digital norms; creations utilizing obsolete materials to innovate within emerging media cultures; “imaginary media”—realized projects that never existed; works that creatively rework and repurpose archival materials; and explorations that dissect media machines to reveal their inner workings. (139-140) While this list is not exhaustive, it provides a structured lens through which the interplay between art, technology, and history can be examined, showcasing how artists can transform media into dynamic artistic expressions.

Another insightful text that discusses the practical dimensions of media archaeology beyond its theoretical underpinnings is Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka's article, “Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method.” In this work, the authors propose viewing media archaeology as an active artistic method, integral to critical creation and hands-on production. They present media archaeology as not only a method for excavating the repressed, forgotten, or past elements but also as an approach that extends into an artistic method closely related to “DIY culture, circuit bending, hardware hacking, and other exercises that challenge the political economy of information technology.” (425) In discussing the intersection of media archaeology and art, Hertz and Parikka also engage with the concept of “planned obsolescence” to critique contemporary consumer culture. They highlight how capitalist strategies aim for “increasing the speed of obsolescence and stimulating the need to purchase” (425). Media artists, as Hertz and Parikka emphasize, adopt the roles of hackers and activists, transforming the typical consumerist approach to electronics by extending and altering their intended use. This involves delving into, modifying, and repurposing technologies as a core strategy within media art,

effectively positioning media archaeology as an artistic method of resistance. Through creative reinterpretation and reclamation of outdated technology, media artists provide a commentary on and challenge to the disposability entrenched in capitalism, prompting a broader reflection on consumption, waste, and sustainability in technology. By doing so, they foster a more mindful and transformative interaction with the technologies that permeate daily life. Hertz and Parikka describe 'bending or repurposing the archive of media history' as a practice of “changing the taken-for-granted function of the technology” that puts forward a practical application for media archaeology—in their words, “a methodology of media archaeological art.” (429)

Media archaeological art, which often involves remaking imaginary and alternative media, embodies what Siegfried Zielinski refers to as variantology. Zielinski notes that variantology “does not lend itself to the purposes of standardization,” rather, it involves deconstructing and reconstructing media objects anew. (Zielinski and Wagnermaier 2) In the Foucauldian sense, media objects are regarded as archives that transcend traditional definitions of archive as a mere physical repository for official documents. Media comprise underlying materialities and technical properties, including hardware and software processes that participate in circulating time and memory. In this sense, media archaeological art generates varied forms of “anarchives.” In Zielinski’s model of media archaeology known as AnArchaeology, “anarchives” are described as “complementary opposite and hence an effective alternative to [the official] archive” (Zielinski and Winthrop-Young 121). Zielinski’s anarchaeological concept is specifically designed with art practices in mind.

Media archaeological art, as intricately defined by scholars like Huhtamo, Parikka, Hertz, Zielinski, and others, embodies a spectrum of forms and methodologies. In submitting to its multiplicity, this special issue of MAST showcases how the confluence of media archaeology

and art broadens the horizons for both creative practice and scholarly research. The contributors to this issue—each a hybrid of artist-scholar or practitioner-researcher—present works that transcend a mere media analysis. By exploring the intricate layers and aspects of media, their works reveal the entwined narratives of the past, present, and future, enriching our grasp of its profound role and influence within the fabric of human culture.

The contribution of “An Old Soul in a Young Body: Reincarnating Time in *Status Quontinuum*” lies in its innovative blend of historical visual media technologies with contemporary artistic practices. This article focuses on the work of Guido Devadder, a 3D-printed zoetrope installation, titled *Status Quontinuum*, highlighting how it merges the principles of the phenakistiscope with modern digital and 3D printing technologies. This fusion underscores the concept of “finding the new in the old,” as Zielinski discusses, illustrating how historical media technologies can invigorate contemporary art. Rather than merely preserving a historical visual medium, the work transforms it into a contemporary art form, adding a new layer of understanding and appreciation for these once-obsolete technologies. The transition from digital simulations to 3D-printed objects emphasizes the importance of materiality in digital media—a key theme in media archaeology which often explores the material and technical aspects of media artifacts to understand their historical and cultural contexts. Moreover, the installation’s use of looping animations and its setup reflect non-linear conceptions of time and history, showing how the integration of historical and contemporary media technologies can shape perceptions of time and memory. The synthesis of theory and practice in this piece exemplifies how media archaeology can enlighten our understanding of the past while also inspiring innovative artistic methodologies. Here, the authors present a compelling case for the relevance of media archaeology in both understanding and influencing contemporary art.

Zachary Furste's article "Media Harmonics: Synesthetic Pleasure and Operative Series" explores the conceptual overlaps between different media forms and the sensory experiences they evoke. Furste introduces the term "media harmonics," discussing how the concept goes beyond the realms of auditory experience to include a multisensory engagement with media, drawing on historical and theoretical frameworks from Pythagoras's harmonic ratios to Richard Feynman's physics lectures, and incorporating modern digital techniques like the Fast Fourier Transform. Furste's argument highlights that media can foster a synesthetic experience, merging various sensory perceptions. This idea is well illustrated by the author's project (compressions.cc), which incorporates video, text, and interactive participation. The article weaves together extensive historical references—from ancient theories of harmony and 19th-century mathematics to 20th-century digital signal processing—establishing a comprehensive background for viewing contemporary media practices within a long continuum of technological evolution. Through the lens of media archaeology, Furste presents media not merely as tools or platforms, but as active entities shaping sensory and cognitive experiences. By emphasizing the artistic dimensions of media through synesthetic pleasure, he enriches the discussion on how art practices can be expanded through media that engage multiple senses simultaneously. This dual focus on historical and artistic dimensions not only widens the scope of media studies but also fosters a deeper appreciation of the interplay between technology, art, and sensory perception.

Yuxiang Dong's article, "Simulacra and Media Genealogy: Notes on *T01_[01.1a-37.1c]-T04_[01.1-80.1]*," investigates the intersection of media, cultural governance, and historical representation in China's anti-Japanese TV dramas. The article focuses on two series of works from the author's project: *Type I_37 Photographs of Zhou Weiguo from 1932 to 1945* and *Type II_Research of 17 Remains of Xiaowangzhuang Battle*. Drawing on Baudrillard's concept of

simulacra, Dong argues that these TV series, much like his *Type I* project, create a hyperreality—a reality without an origin. In *Type I*, photographs of a main character from a popular TV series are manipulated and re-photographed, layering artifice upon artifice, and calling into question the authenticity and origin of the images. This illustrates how media distorts and reconstructs reality, shaping public perception and identity. Dong's project exposes how these constructed realities are accepted as true, despite their evident artificiality. In *Type II*, the author extends his analysis to the media genealogy of anti-Japanese cultural productions, tracing their evolution from street theater to contemporary memes and cybernationalism. Dong's method of juxtaposing fabricated relics, newspaper clippings, and manipulated photographs to challenge the authoritative historical narratives presented in TV dramas and critiques the notion of authenticity in historical representation. This method aligns with Foucault's genealogical approach, which scrutinizes the historical conditions and power dynamics that foster certain discourses. This practice-based study profoundly exemplifies how art can serve as a potent tool for media critique, prompting viewers to reconsider the authenticity of mediated histories and the role of media in constructing national identity.

The article “Unearthed Objects: S3026 and Michael Marder’s *object earth*” offers a complex exploration of media arts through a philosophical and ecological lens. The originality of the piece lies in its innovative approach to blending media art with ecological and philosophical inquiries, establishing a novel framework for understanding and interacting with the environment. This unique framework not only broadens our understanding of media art's scope but also contributes to ecological discourse by providing a visceral, immersive way to engage with and reflect on ecological issues. The use of metaphors such as 'mirage' and 'qanat' deepens the discussion, linking philosophical concepts to tangible ecological impacts effectively. The

metaphor of mirage, inspired by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of perception and the body, illustrates the role of the experiencer's perspective in shaping their perceptual world. Meanwhile, the qanat metaphor, which refers to an ancient water management system, supports the authors' advocacy for a vertical exploration of time and knowledge over the horizontal continuity seen in traditional narratives. Furthermore, the article employs media archaeology not merely for analyzing past media artifacts but as a vibrant tool in the process of creation and artistic research. This approach is particularly compelling in demonstrating how media archaeology can be used as a creative tool not only to unearth and recontextualize historical narratives and past technologies but also to address and reinterpret contemporary conditions. In this sense, the art project illustrates a dynamic site of investigation and production, where historical insights and artistic innovation meet to challenge and expand the horizons of both viewers and creators. Through their work, the authors push the boundaries of how media is understood and utilized, positioning the project at the vibrant intersection of media archaeology and transformative artistic practice.

Alexander Greenhough's article, "Adapting *Jane Eyre*," delves into the myriad adaptations of Charlotte Brontë's novel, exploring the transformation of the story across various media and cultural contexts. Using frameworks such as media archaeology and videographic criticism, the article examines how different adaptations employ modern technologies and cinematic techniques to reshape the narrative, challenging traditional literary criticism approaches and presenting adaptation as a multifaceted scholarly and creative endeavor. Greenhough's analysis is particularly notable for its exploration of the mechanics behind the adaptation process. The article reveals how technological advances, directorial interpretations, and evolving audience expectations influence the portrayal of story and character elements in

various *Jane Eyre* adaptations. Through a digital montage of film versions, the author's video essay also offers unique insights into the selective and creative nature of adaptation as an act of reinterpretation and reinvention. By merging scholarly analysis with videographic methods, Greenhough not only enriches our understanding of film and literary adaptations but also encourages a reevaluation of the boundaries between analytical and creative processes in the digital age, showcasing the dynamic interaction between historical media forms and their contemporary implications.

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Dr. Maryam Muliaee is a media artist-scholar and the founding editor of MAST (The Journal of Media Art Study and Theory), an open access peer-reviewed journal published by the University at Buffalo. She holds a PhD in Media Study from the University at Buffalo, and recently has worked as Post-doctoral Associate with the Media Archaeology Lab and Critical Media Practices at the University of Colorado Boulder (2021-2023). She has published in peer-reviewed journals (*Frames Cinema Journal*, *Ekphrasis*, *Metacritic*) and book chapters with Peter Lang (2019), Bloomsbury Publishing (2021), Routledge (forthcoming 2025) and Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming 2026). She is currently working on her monograph which explores feminist media archaeology and noncommunication aesthetics in media art. Email: mmuliaee@buffalo.edu.