Toward a Public Media Archaeology: Museums, Media, and Historiography

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TOWARD A PUBLIC MEDIA ARCHAEOLOGY

P H I L I P P   D O M I N I K   K E I D L

Museums, Media, and Historiography

WHAT, WHEN, AND WHERE IS MEDIA ARCHAEOLOGY?

Although media archaeology has developed into a widespread re-

search framework since the 1990s, scholars still struggle to find a

generally accepted answer to the question of *what* it is. Media archaeologists as well

as their critics are still debating whether the term refers to "an approach, a model, a

project, an exercise, a perspective, or a discipline."[1] Indeed, media archaeologists are

loosely bound together by a shared interest in new historiographical methods based

on the study and reevaluation of media temporality and materiality. Wanda Strauven

divides this shared research agenda into four dominant research inquiries that seek

the old in the new, the new in the old, recurring topoi, and ruptures and discontinuity.[2]

However, while media archaeologists have continued to debate what media archaeology

is or could be, the related questions of *when* and *where* media archaeology is practiced have attracted considerably less attention.

Given that "the history of media archaeology has been a history of discourse-oriented analysis,"[3] scholars have located media archaeological ideas largely within the realm of academia. Media archaeologists might venture to various archives, collections, museums, attics, and basements to study media technologies neglected by teleological historiographies. Although scholars have turned to artifacts typically outside of the academy, they have rarely scrutinized how media archaeological thinking materializes outside the institutional and intellectual frameworks of the university complex. Until now, the only nonscholarly practices that have garnered considerable attention are media archaeological art and media archeology as a curatorial practice for art and large-scale projections.[4] Thus, despite its reputation as a "nomadic enterprise" and a "traveling concept" that easily crosses disciplinary boundaries,[5] it appears that media archaeology does not travel outside of academia or the art world. Consequently, we know relatively little about how the technological, cultural, social, and political effects that have shaped university-based and artistic media archaeology might have led to media archaeological thinking and practices outside these two institutional contexts.

Thomas Elsaesser describes media archaeology as a symptom of new film history, the vast and fast adaptation of digital technologies, and the increasing display of cinematic and other moving images in art museums and galleries beginning in the 1970s and 1980s.[6] While new film history might have emerged in the relatively enclosed space of academia, the two other symptoms Elsaesser lists have had substantial impact on conceptions of media technologies and histories in the public realm. Smaller, lighter, and handier media technologies were advertised to consumers, who then had to adapt and use them in everyday practices, either replacing or combining them with older media forms. Museum exhibitions on film and media reached vast audiences through advertisements, reviews, and public debates about film and media as heritage. Scholars and artists might be the most prominent and visible media archaeologists, but if media archaeology indeed represents a "historiographic 'perspective correction'" in the changing mediascape of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries,[7] it also becomes necessary to investigate participants in these debates who are neither scholars nor artists.

A certain indifference to nonscholarly historiography is not an exclusive characteristic of media archaeology. Historians and archaeologists have a long history of marginalizing public engagements with the past and often see them as superficial, nostalgic, commercial, and ultimately inferior to their own work.[8] Studies on everyday experiences of and in history making have been limited to the subfield of public history

and archaeology, respectively, in which scholars champion the participatory nature of the making of history.[9] Consequently, public history and archaeology do not engage with scholars employed outside academia or scholars' creation of an accessible history in public spaces such as the museum. Public history and archaeology refer to historiography as an inclusive activity and engagement with a diverse range of objects, places, and practices deeply embedded in everyday life. If we apply the inclusive notion of "participatory historical culture" to media archaeology,[10] it becomes possible to think about the notion of public media archaeology as a framework to study involvement in the production of history beyond scholarly and textual production.

Of course, it might seem counterproductive to expand the already open definition of media archaeology and to further dilute it by association with a broad concept like the "public." Indeed, public media archaeology does not intend to fix media archaeology's unfixed character within academic discourses. Furthermore, the notion of public media archaeology should not represent a straightforward validation of marginalized approaches and practices. Rather, public media archaeology offers an opportunity to investigate how media archaeological thinking is practiced outside scholarly frameworks and the art world. The concept is not interested in how media users engage with old or new technologies but rather in how perceived historical connections and ruptures result in alternative conceptualizations of past, present, and potential future media as well as how these practices result in extra-academic historical speculation.

Consequently, the notion of public media archaeology urges us to expand our examination to objects, sources, and sites outside archival collections and libraries that are less likely to be collected or make the transition from private to institutionalized collections. The inclusion of ephemeral, short-lived, or unrealized media technologies has been at the core of media archeological scholarship, but the proposed investigation outside academia intends to do more than find new additions to a long list of neglected technologies. The concept is also meant to enable a more concrete study of the knowledge these practices create and mediate independently from scholarly intervention. In other words, individuals and groups collecting, displaying, and working with media technology outside academia and the art world do not just provide the hardware for examination. Instead, their work with media technologies mediates ideas about media history that do not necessarily adapt scholarly sources but function and circulate independently in more vernacular discourses. If, up to this moment, media archaeology has focused mainly on scholarly and artistic practices, public media archaeology is dedicated to more vernacular modes of production by acknowledging and examining how knowledge is created and disseminated.

As will be elaborated in this article, *ephemeral, short-lived,* and *unrealized* are

adjectives that should not be applied only to individuals, groups, and practices outside institutional frameworks and networks. They also describe media technologies and practices that museums and archives developed for the communication of knowledge about their collections, which in recent years have displayed previously neglected technologies in their galleries. Part of the curatorial process of such exhibitions has been the development of installations to present the material objects and contextual information that go beyond the mere arrangement of displays and labels. Yet, while archival collections have migrated into exhibition spaces, educational museum installations rarely make it into their institutions' archives. Once the exhibitions finish, they are dismantled or repurposed and at best documented in the form of production notes and photographs that might not be considered worth archiving. The result is the loss of media objects as well as the erasure of how curators intended to mediate historical knowledge and, in turn, how visitors engaged and worked with this knowledge. In this way, museums and their archives fail to collect, document, preserve, and evaluate their own shifting roles, methods, and technologies in the making of history. A dual loss therefore becomes particularly evident when we look at film and media museums whose visualizations of history are as much forgotten as the history of visualizing film and media history itself.

This article discusses the concept of public media archaeology as it pertains to the practices of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne and argues that ACMI is a media archeological laboratory where curators and visitors engage with media archeological thinking and knowledge production through the development of and engagement with media installations respectively. The article outlines the potential of film and media museums to act as historiographical workshops where speculations about film and media's past are encouraged. However, rather than framing these modes of thinking as direct forms of applied media archeological theory to the museum, I argue that public media archeology is defined through the process of defamiliarizing common historical narratives and institutional parameters. While media in the museum have been previously defined as expanded cinema, othered cinema, museum media, and useful cinema,[11] public media archaeology is used in this article to describe the creation of what can be called defamiliar cinema and media.

WHAT, WHEN, AND WHERE IS PUBLIC MEDIA ARCHAEOLOGY?

The museum can be approached as a media archaeological laboratory from the perspective of both curators and visitors. The former requires an examination of the development and production of the exhibition narrative, whereas the latter demands an examination of how visitors engage with the exhibition content and activities. In other words, we

must understand how curators mediate media archaeological thinking through the act of curating as well as how visitors can and do participate in these debates throughout their visit. This requires an understanding of the media archaeological modes of thinking implied in the exhibition narrative. It also encourages the study of the preproduction of these exhibitions as much as how visitors contribute their own knowledge and perspectives. Accordingly, it requires the analysis of how particular historical contexts are placed into a multimedia narrative that guides visitors in their exploration, while it also depends on an understanding of visitors' spontaneous and unscripted interactions with the exhibition. Both approaches are complicated, because curatorial notes are hard to access—if they have been created at all—while visitor engagement rarely leaves visible traces in the exhibition space. If documented, however, public media archaeology can be used as a conceptual tool to understand these two processes.

The notion of public media archaeology draws from recent research projects that take a more hands-on, experimental, and playful approach to discourse-oriented media archaeology. Wanda Strauven and Alexandra Schneider's research project, Kinderspiel, examines how children engage with media's different temporal and historical layers through their free play "with home video tools to the bricolage of old and new media devices, from repurposing existing media objects to drawing or designing their own toys."[12] Their project stresses alternative localities for media archaeology, including playgrounds, kindergartens, schools, living rooms, and bedrooms, among others. It also frames media archaeology as a spontaneous, improvised, and ephemeral undertaking that emerges in everyday life without a theoretical background or interests in mind. Indeed, objects and ideas are as quickly constructed and used to produce media as they are dismantled and erased. Media archaeological play is therefore an important reminder that official collection and preservation policies exclude many processes and practices that thereby are irretrievably lost. It also points to the fact that family homes and estates might be the most diverse archives for the study of public media archaeology. In many ways, the spontaneous, improvised, and ephemeral—not to mention undocumented—undertakings associated with children's play can also be linked to the contemporary practices of museums that ask their visitors to engage in play, and produce content and knowledge, during their stay. But the playful character of media archeology as practice also relates to curatorial moments of brainstorming and free-associated planning, before budgetary, technological, legal, and spatial restrictions limit plans and vision.

Although more closely positioned within traditional academic environments, Andreas Fickers and Annie van den Oever place a similar emphasis on hands-on engagement with their concept of experimental media archaeology. They argue that media

archaeologists should focus less on discursive reconstructions of remembered usages and configured, expert, and amateur users and engage more through historical reenactments with media's materiality and past.[13] They argue that this form of experimental approach will provide

> new insights in the sense of time and temporality inscribed in the materiality of media technologies . . . enhance awareness of the spatial and topographical information inscribed in media practices . . . enable a better understanding of the "constructivist nature" of media technology products [and] make scholars of past media technologies "experience" rather than intellectually appropriate the acts of making and screening film as social and cultural practices.[14]

Their experimental study of media technologies is particularly relevant for museums as their exhibitions depend on historical reenactment and participation. Of course, museums often present history to their visitors through aural presentations, and the direct, haptic handling of original displays is rare. This complicates the hands-on approach the authors describe. Yet, interactive workstations and workshops within the museum space offer hands-on engagement, which fosters experimentation and thus a better understanding of cultural practice. In turn, for curators, the planning and production of exhibitions and their media installations and displays entail collaboration with archivists, engineers, and the millions of media amateurs, collectors, and other technical experts that van den Oever and Fickers deem so important.[15] Museums therefore relate to experimental media archaeology and its emphasis on knowledge creation outside academia, although they emphasize the evaluation and interpretation of this knowledge without the direct interference of university-trained scholars. Thus public media archaeology draws from experimental media archaeology but simultaneously aims to expand it. It is less interested in collecting data for media archaeologists to analyze than in providing a conceptual tool to understand where, how, and when media archaeological thinking has become part of a wider public culture that deals with the history of a constantly altering mediascape.

The ideological connotations of "public" are not unproblematic, particularly in relation to the institution of the museum. Nick Merriman explains the inherent tension between the institutional and intellectual connotations of the term as follows:

> The first [meaning] is the association of the word "public" with the state and its institutions (public bodies, public buildings, public office, the public interest), which emerges in the era of intensive state formation from the Early Modern

period onwards. . . . The second is the concept of "the public" as a group of individuals who debate issues and consume cultural products, and whose reactions inform "public opinion." . . . On the one hand, therefore, we have a notion in which the state assumes the role of speaking on behalf of the public and of acting "in the public interest." . . . On the other hand, the second notion of "the public" encompasses debate and opinion, and is inherently unpredictable and conflictual. . . . So, the two notions of "the public"—the state and the people—have always been potentially in tension.[16]

Public media archaeology refers neither to the state nor to a homogenized conceptualization of a unified public sphere; rather, it refers to notions of public history and archaeology and functions as a "shorthand term to describe the huge diversity of the population, who do not earn their living" as professional media archaeologists. Furthermore, it acknowledges that "those who are not professional archaeologists [are] a shifting set of cross-cutting interest groups which sometimes have a great deal in common, but often have little in common at all."[17] In other words, public media archaeology refers to all those agents and practices engaged with media archaeological thinking outside direct academic organizations and infrastructures.

How, then, could one respond to the questions of "what, when, and where is public media archaeology?" Answers to the first two parts of the question do not differ from those debated among scholars. Media archaeology as practiced in public engages with different layers of media temporality and materiality and participates in parallel readings of old and new media. Consequently, public media archaeology is not a new or recent phenomenon but emerged parallel to academic discourses, if not earlier in the form of private collections, analyses, and speculations. As such, the concept acknowledges the diverse contexts, approaches, and results of media archaeological thinking. It functions as an umbrella term that encompasses play, historical reenactments, and other everyday practices in public and private environments. The museum is only one site of many, and the work of private collectors who preserve, restore, and build media technologies is as much a form of public media archaeology as practices of such professional and amateur preservation and restoration projects of private photography, film and media technologies, merchandise collections, steampunk, and archaeogaming.[18]

Another pressing question is how public media archaeology represents a historiographic perspective correction. Is it even possible to present alternative historiographies beyond monographs, anthologies, seminars, or lectures that will convince readers, listeners, and spectators? Instead of approaching public media archaeology

as the production of alternative histories to replace established narratives, it might be more fruitful to describe it as a defamiliarization of established historical knowledge that forces one to see common history in an unfamiliar way, enhancing perception and contemplation of historiography. Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky, when he introduced the concept of defamiliarization to literary theory, intended to counteract brief perception, insufficient attentiveness, and a lack of responsiveness to objects and texts. As Shklovsky explains, after several encounters with an object, it becomes so familiar that "we do not see it—hence we cannot say anything significant about it."[19] Shklovsky's observations pertain to art, but they have a similar impact on public media archeology and its products. They reject or defy linear narratives of the past and force us to look at film and media history in complex terms. In other words, public media archaeology does not provide new histories but instead encourages a heightened awareness of historiography itself. It insists that a certain narrative structure is a choice that could have taken other forms. Media archaeological thinking within the institutional context of the museum results in the defamiliarization of film history as much as the defamiliarization of the institution of the museum.

ACMI AND THE DEFAMILIARIZATION OF THE (FILM AND MEDIA) MUSEUM

ACMI's decision to promote itself as a center instead of a museum is a form of institutional defamiliarization. Founded on the desire to "position itself as a pioneering new media institution [which would] engage in the production of alternative forms of cultural citizenship,"[20] ACMI was simultaneously associated with and distanced from familiar frameworks of museums, archives, and libraries. As John Smithies, the center's inaugural CEO, explained after the opening in 2002,

> it is possible to include ACMI in the family of a museum, library or gallery but this too easily ignores the differences. [ACMI] is an example of a new generation of cultural institutions—one that will move beyond the limitation of a physical site and that fully embraces and celebrates the dominant pervasive mediums of the past 100 years and the future.[21]

Indeed, the desire to distance ACMI from traditional notions of cultural institutions has been a common thread in the development of the center from the 1980s to its opening. ACMI was supposed to become a central space to learn about and foster participation among different agents in the production of media. Early briefing papers, curatorial

statements, and production notes written in the 1990s indicate that curators never envisioned ACMI as a site where visitors would learn solely about film and media history; rather, they conceived of it as a space where the public and the industry would not only experience all forms of moving image media but also engage in the conception of future media forms.

The idea that ACMI was a center rather than a museum, archive, or library certainly was supposed to place it in an increasingly national and international competitive heritage market.[22] But the idea of a center also indicated the desire to at least partially replace overarching narratives that address all visitors with more open, fluid, and diverse content. This would, in turn, encourage an engagement with media temporality that traditional, object-focused approaches would not be able to offer. ACMI's embrace of flexibility is not a single example but forms part of a landscape of museological reform, in which, according to Jennie Morgan, museums become "flexible." As she explains, "the flexible museum does not seek to express narratives [but instead draws] on new kinds of ordering categories" that are "rooted less in chronology and traditional subject-disciplines and more in the social, experiential and emotional."[23] Consequently, the flexible museum embraces the impossibility of comprehensiveness and the partial and evolving nature of knowledge. It does this by following broader museological trends that replace notions of objectivity and fixity with more attentiveness to visitor interest and expectations.[24]

ACMI's desire for quick change and more topical gallery and visitor experiences—as well as an increased contemplation about moving images and their past and future—is evident in descriptions about possible exhibition technologies and display strategies. The team behind the center aimed to push the boundaries of presentation methods used by film and media museums in Frankfurt, London, and New York.[25] ACMI's curators wanted the moving image and immersive screen experiences, rather than the materials used to produce, distribute, and promote them, to take center stage. Early planning phases were defined by an emphasis on new digital technologies that promised to simplify the inclusion of screens and projections into exhibition spaces. This would enable more complex constructions of media installations, allowing for changing programs and display arrangements. Various documents written in the 1990s also express ACMI's curators' desire not only to excavate machines for display but also to develop and work with state-of-the-art technologies. This reveals how important it was for the curators to engage with the future of media rather than with the past.

Many of the notes indicate how the curators experimented with innovative displays.[26] One of these includes a description of an elevator video lift with liquid crystal displays that would offer a short but memorable journey to the main exhibition.

As visitors were fully surrounded by moving images, the lift ride was supposed to play with visitors' perceptions of movement and speed. Each section of the center was to be structured around a different screen environment, which ranged from relatively familiar cinematic projection spaces to screen panoramas and virtual reality booths. As was repeatedly stated in the documents, a screen-based exhibition design offered flexibility, as it would enable ACMI to show different programs throughout the day. In other words, the center could meet the needs and expectations of different visitor groups, targeting schools in the morning and early afternoon and adults in the late afternoon and evening. In addition to fast content changes, the exhibition space itself was supposed to be flexible and mobile. Robots would move with the visitors or follow them through certain parts of the exhibition. Handheld devices were supposed to provide extra information and individual interaction with screens, offering a selection of exhibition guides and digital extensions of the physical exhibition space. Furthermore, online visitors from all over the world could explore a digital extension of the gallery from home.[27] While the documents and notes available at the Public Record Office Victoria in Melbourne are brief and reveal little about how far these ideas progressed in the preproduction process, they nonetheless demonstrate the creativity and motivation to use digital technologies for the conceptualization of timely exhibition frameworks that would create new forms of public interaction with and production of moving image histories.

The reviewed documents do not indicate specific reasons for the change in direction, and it would be mere speculation to determine what was impossible or too expensive to build. The materials do not include concrete construction sketches, budget plans, or any other form of production notes indicating how advanced the planning was for the individual installations. But the ideas outlined in the documents point toward the need to develop a more general understanding of curators as media producers whose work is not limited to the selection, arrangement, and description of cameras, costumes, set designs, props, merchandise, and memorabilia, among other things. Curators are also involved in selecting scenes, conducting and recording interviews, and conceptualizing and producing montages, compilations, collages, split-screen sequences, and animations.[28] This creation of screen content comes with the task of developing and constructing media installations that display the produced content. Screens and projections need to be integrated into complex architectural arrangements in the overall exhibition designs. Scale, portability, mobility, flexibility, and durability therefore become concrete questions curators need to engage with when planning where and how to place and arrange screens. Each placement raises questions for curators about the site specificity of the screen and the experience it offers in terms of time,

space, and exhibition content. Ultimately, these imaginary media indicate the desires and aspirations projected onto communication technologies. They also position ACMI as an active space of collaborative media production rather than merely an institution. ACMI did not realize many of these exhibition features, which is why they can be best described as imaginary media for an imaginary institution.

As Eric Kluitenberg explains, imaginary media are more than metaphors or contemporary claims about technological possibilities.[29] They are connected to the lineages of tangible media. They raise hopes, impact developments, disappoint, and sometimes even become realized. Imaginary media research, then, is an alternative to apparatus historiography. It provides insights into how imaginary media are also shaping the representation of real machines and technologies.[30] In the case of ACMI, such research helps us to understand how media transform the museum in terms of content production and invites us to rethink its institutional boundaries. It is possible to connect this to a longer tradition of museums that use media to establish firm historiographies. However, the center's proposals urge us to develop a more concrete understanding of how these media installations create an (imaginary) exhibition space that is no longer simply a place to experience the past of cinema but a space where future media are produced and experienced.

When ACMI opened its Screen Gallery, it was celebrated as a state-of the-art exhibition venue. This initial excitement, however, was followed by large-scale public disenchantment. Critics expressed skepticism regarding the high maintenance costs and subsidies necessary to maintain the complex technological infrastructure of the exhibition spaces. The institution was hard to find and harder to navigate once inside. Others argued that the programming of the exhibitions was too intellectual and inaccessible for nonexpert visitors. Soon, ACMI's exhibition space had acquired a cold and clinical reputation. Visitors experienced a sense of emptiness as they explored its fragmented spaces. For some, the focus on digital technology was too heavy and left them wondering why the center had no permanent exhibition with cinematic artifacts.[31]

Although ACMI's aspirations remained unfilled, the now-closed Screen Gallery suggests the potential of museum media for institutional defamiliarization. Visitors' contemplation was redirected from exhibition content to the exhibition framework itself. As a completely screen-based exhibition, the Screen Gallery provided interactive and immersive media experiences that favored chronological media histories. The content-flexible gallery generated debate about what kind of institution ACMI should be. The curators had not anticipated, though, the public's desire for traditional exhibition models. Only a few years after its opening, ACMI struggled with financial, management,

and image problems. When Tony Sweeney was appointed director in 2004, the center embarked on redevelopment and turned to more accessible exhibition formats. The 2009 opening of Screen Worlds, its current permanent exhibition, pushed ACMI closer to traditional, linear exhibition models.

SCREEN WORLDS AND THE DEFAMILIARIZATION OF FILM AND MEDIA HISTORY

Imaginary media are only one of several heuristic categories that can be used to describe museum installations. Screen environments and educational media installations can also be approached through Jussi Parikka's categories of media archaeological art that include imaginary media but also (1) visually engage with historical themes, (2) invoke alternative histories, (3) use obsolete materials and solutions to engage with emerging media cultures, (4) draw from concrete archives, and (5) engage with the materiality of technology.[32] Many of the media machines imagined and produced for film and media museums fall into at least one of these heuristic categories. The work with media technologies to present old and obsolete forms as well as to re-create old ones with new technologies is an inherent challenge in curating these exhibition formats. The resulting new assemblages represent media histories' multiple temporalities and materialities. Although these installations may offer visitors the chance to visualize historical information that shapes and supports a predominant narrative chosen by the exhibitions in ACMI's Screen Worlds, they have an opposite effect when they scrutinize the narrative on display.

Screen Worlds contains several installations that draw from archival resources to present and engage with the materiality of film technologies and other production materials. These installations' visualization of film and media history defamiliarizes the historical narrative that unfolds in the rest of the exhibition. In many regards, Screen Worlds is a compromise between ACMI's original curatorial vision and public demand for more accessible, if not traditional, programming. At first sight, an abundance of screens and photographs seems to dominate the space and overshadow the many costumes, scripts, concept art, merchandise, and other production materials or memorabilia that are placed between the different moving and unmoving images. Screen Worlds approximates an object-centered exhibition, the approach that the original plans for the museum tried to avoid. In fact, the exhibition does follow on first sight what David Bordwell has called the "basic story"[33] and Thomas Elsaesser the "telos" of film history: "greater and greater realism, evolutionary schemes from silent to sound and from

black and white to color, from flat, two-dimensional screen surfaces to 3D, and from the peephole to the IMAX screen."[34]

Several media installations, however, break with the deterministic narratives of technological progress, canonical masterpieces, and the achievements and inventions of a few masters and pioneers. They encourage visitors to ask why certain objects and topics are featured more prominently than others. This becomes evident in at least two of the exhibition's three units. Whereas the interactive playground *Sensation* resembles a science center more than a traditional museum, the *Emergence* and *Voices* units follow patterns of technological progress, artistic innovation, and the canonization of groundbreaking inventions and production. While *Voices* introduces Australian talent working in media industries, *Emergence* covers the technological development of moving images, introducing them one at a time: film, sound, television, broadcasting, video games, and then the internet. Yet a closer examination of the digital and analog media on display indicates that the installations at times rupture the conventional historical narrative, forcing visitors to think about the process of historiography itself. In other words, they defamiliarize film history.

This is particularly the case in the unit *Emergence,* which is arranged in a circle and leaves it to the visitor to decide whether to follow a path from the seventeenth century to the future or the other way around. While this form of arrangement enables visitors to jump nonchronologically between different sections and periods, the main rifts that might encourage media archaeological thinking come in the form of different digital installations featured in the exhibition. The first rupture—or the last, depending on where a visitor begins her walk through the exhibition—is the section *The Future*. It is introduced with three quotes that highlight the unpredictable success and expansion of media. Charlie Chaplin's claim that cinema is "little more than a fad" is as much quoted as Lee de Forest's judgment of television as an "impossibility." These perspectives are complemented by *Popular Science* magazine's prediction that computers in the future may weigh no more than 1.5 tons. With its question, "Where do you go next?" the museum provides visitors with the agency to speculate what kinds of media may or may not be successful in the future, what kinds of qualities media should have, and what qualities that are irrelevant today will be of importance tomorrow. The three incorrect forecasts, thus, jeopardize the trajectory and claims proposed by the exhibition and question the truth claims of the museum's proposed history.

The arrangement of media history along the old-to-new continuum is further problematized with an installation named *Genealogy,* within *The Future* exhibition. The installation label states that it is impossible to define a clear origin of moving images and

therefore declares the previously or forthcoming strict and uninterrupted periodization invalid. *Genealogy*'s label emphasizes that the history of media is not "the product of predictable and necessary advance[s] from primitive to . . . complex apparatus." Instead, the visitor is reminded that moving image technologies never die, always rematerializing in another form, and that innovation does not proceed in a straight line but instead is always looping back on itself. The installation ends with a quote from James Burke that asks whether we "can consider the past and see the future." The visitors have not arrived in the future per se; rather, they are asked to look at media history as a cyclical, not linear, development, in which phenomena appear, disappear, and reappear.

A dynamic chart visualizes the many origins of modern media. It outlines the multiple historical affiliations and resonances of different moving images without ever reproducing the rhetoric of straightforward genealogies. The visitors can touch an image projected on a table to access information about different devices. Each box connects to various others, connecting several audiovisual media and highlighting the unstable categories of old and new. Every time the visitor touches a reference point, alternative options and paths pop up across the table that offer various opportunities to dig up new influences and connections. The installations send the visitor deeper and deeper into a labyrinth of numerous pasts and possible futures. The vast web of possibilities confronts the visitor with seemingly endless options that slowly move across the table and from the background to the foreground, thereby making it nearly impossible for the visitor to keep track of his own path. The installation also includes devices absent in the rest of the exhibition, such as the microscope or shadow cards, which expand the historical range of media from modernity to far beyond the Renaissance. These always-emerging connections dismantle narrative modes of media history within and beyond the exhibition. Depending on which section the visitors start with, they are reminded that the selection of apparatus, objects, and moving images on display forms only a snapshot of media history. Furthermore, the exhibition stresses that contemporary mass entertainment is much younger than other techniques of seeing and hearing. *Emergence*'s display of the chronological path of media development over the last 120 years transforms it into a multitemporal window revealing alternative advances that could have been, and still are, plausible. In other words, the installation implies that cinema's future might not be exhausted; other directions are still possible.

The introduction of imaginary media in some installations further denies the notion of a singular origin story for moving image media. A compilation of science fiction movies, for example, introduces the genre as one of the most fruitful grounds for the study of imaginary media. There are scenes from *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999) and *Minority Report* (Steven Spielberg, 2002), among other films. While the former shows

an imagined video game system plugged into a player's body to immerse him in virtual reality, the latter shows a video wallpaper displaying individually tailored advertising messages for each passerby. Another exhibit juxtaposes these fictional accounts of possible future technologies with actual media currently in development in various technical laboratories. A label directly addresses the uncertainty of these media's future and their role in production, distribution, and consumption. In fact, the exhibition highlights the possibility that these media will never make it into mainstream production and therefore would be absent from media history.

One workstation offers a glimpse of how visitors react to these media archaeological ideas and what ideas they might bring to the museum space themselves. ACMI invites visitors to draw and describe their own visions of future media with a pen on a piece of paper. A selection of previous predictions that were posted online on the museum's Flickr account is projected on a large screen, appearing in different variations each time.[35] What unfolds on-screen is a range of ideas about media as a means of transcending space and time. Moreover, the sketches mix reality and virtual reality, foresee the increasing convergence of the body with technology, and introduce new connections between currently existing and past media. These idiosyncratic sketches of futuristic media, which oscillate between utopian and dystopian visions, document unrealized possibilities, the reinvention of obsolete media, policies for possible archives of the future, and connections of the old to the new in unfamiliar ways. Consequently, they undermine the trajectories of progress that the museum otherwise puts on display.

CONCLUSION

Public media archaeology encourages further studies of media archeological practices and processes outside academia. In the case of the museum, this includes the imagination, development, and presentation of media technologies and installations as well as visitor engagement with these machines. By looking at ACMI through the lens of public media archaeology, it has become possible to explore how media archeological ideas can surface even in environments that seem to rely on teleological models of film and media history. ACMI's Screen Worlds does not follow a cohesive media archaeological approach. Nonetheless, the installations imply that ideas about the old in the new, the new in the old, continuities and ruptures, and other recurring topoi are part of the curatorial process of producing media content and objects. Moreover, the visitors' sketches signal that they do engage in these debates within the exhibition space and, most likely, before and after their visit.

The analysis of ACMI also shows that any conclusions can only be preliminary, especially if museums and archives do not systematically collect and make available data about the installations. The documents underlying this research on public media archaeology were often incomplete and unfinished. As such, this argument is only the first step toward a more comprehensive investigation into ACMI's curatorial philosophy and methods. To gain a better understanding of public media archaeology and its role in the museum, it would be necessary to gain further access to documents outlining the production, display, and reception of exhibitions on moving image history. This would include curatorial statements, advertising, budget plans, construction sketches and plans, and correspondence between curators, filmmakers, and archivists. Until these data become accessible, it will be difficult to advance research on film and media histories in the museum and how these exhibitions engage visitors in debates regarding the past, present, and future of media.

This article, then, is also a plea for a media archaeology of film and media museums. Research on these museums needs to be extended to the materiality of the media installations they build. Inspection of how media installations are integrated into an overall exhibition design is complicated because, once the exhibition is dismantled, documentation is rarely kept, and if it is, it is often only available as images. As this study of ACMI has shown, however, media installations form a considerable part of the curatorial process. We can only understand film and media museums' history and their modes of historical production if we acknowledge that they are both media exhibitors and media producers that actively engage in contemporary discourses.

In terms of visitor participation within the space of the museum, these modes of thinking are considerably mediated by the exhibition environment. The ACMI, however, is only one site where public media archaeology appears. While the center's history and its current exhibition have been active sites for media archaeological thinking, further investigations into other film and media museums would delineate how this thinking emerges in other curatorial endeavors. Public media archaeology can help to foster a better understanding of these practices, not as mere case studies for scholars, but as contributions to seemingly common and propagated understandings of film and media history.

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NOTES

1. Wanda Strauven, "Media Archaeology: Where Film History, Media Art and New Media (Can) Meet," in *Preserving and Exhibiting Media Art: Challenges and Perspectives,* ed. Julia Noordegraaf, Cosetta G. Saba, Barbara Le Maître, and Vinzenz Hediger (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), 63.

2. Ibid., 68.

3. Andreas Fickers and Annie van den Oever, "Experimental Media Archaeology: A Plea for New Directions," in *Techné/Technology: Researching Cinema and Media Technologies, Their Development, Use, and Impact,* ed. Annie van den Oever (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 272.

4. For a more detailed discussion of media archaeology and art, see Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka, "Zombie Media: Circuit Bending Media Archaeology into an Art Method," *Leonardo* 45, no. 5 (2012): 424–30; Garnet Hertz and Jussi Parikka, "CTheory Interview: Archaeologies of Media Art," *CTheory,* 2010, http://www.ctheory.net/; Erkki Huhtamo, "Resurrecting the Technological Past: An Introduction to the Archaeology of Media Art," *Intercommunication* 14, 1995, http://www.ntticc.or.jp/; Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 136–58; Strauven, "Media Archaeology," 73–74. For a discussion of media archaeology as a curatorial practice, see Andrew Hoskins and Amy Holdsworth, "Media Archaeology of/ in the Museum," in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies,* vol. 3, *Museum Media,* ed. Michelle Henning, 23–41 (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015). For a general discussion of museums' relationship to media archaeology, see Michelle Henning, "Museums and Media Archaeology: An Interview with Wolfgang Ernst," ibid., 3:3–22.

5. Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?,* 167.

6. Thomas Elsaesser, "Media Archaeology as Symptom," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 14, no. 2 (2016): 183–84.

7. Ibid., 183.

8. In 2015, the *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* dedicated its forum section to the relationship between archeology and media archeology. See *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 2, no. 1 (2015). Jerome de Groot, *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Culture* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1–6.

9. See Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory* (London: Verso, 1996); Paul Ashton and Hilda Kean, eds., *People and Their Pasts: Public History Today* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Hilda Kean and Paul Martin, *The Public History Reader* (Abingdon, U.K.: Routledge, 2013); Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 2003); Nick Merriman, *Public Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 2004).

10. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 190–208.

11. For a detailed discussion of these concepts, see Andrew V. Uroskie, *Between the Black Box and the White Cube: Expanded Cinema and Postwar Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting*

Cinema in Contemporary Art (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); Michelle Henning, *Museums, Media, and Cultural Theory* (Maidenhead, U.K.: Open University Press, 2006); Haidee Wasson, "Big, Fast Museums/Small, Slow Movies: Film, Scale, and the Art Museum," in *Useful Cinema,* ed. Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson, 178–204 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011); Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

12. Wanda Strauven and Alexandra Schneider, "Kinderspiel: A Project on Children as Media Archaeologists, Media Makers and Media Players," http://www.kinderspielproject.com/.

13. Fickers and van den Oever, "Experimental Media Archaeology," 276–77.

14. Ibid., 277.

15. Ibid., 278.

16. Merriman, *Public Archaeology,* 1–2.

17. Ibid., 2.

18. These practices are connected to media archaeological thinking in Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?,* 1–2; Roger Whitson, *Steampunk and Nineteenth-Century Digital Humanities Literary Retrofuturisms, Media Archaeologies, Alternate Histories* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Andrew Reinhard, "Excavating Atari: Where the Media Was the Archaeology," *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 2, no. 1 (2015): 86–93; Raiford Guins, *Game After: A Cultural Study of Video Game Afterlife* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2014); Lincoln Geraghty, *Cult Collectors: Nostalgia, Fandom, and Collecting Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 2014), 183–85. Giovanna Fossati and Annie van den Oever, *Exposing the Film Apparatus: The Film Archive as a Research Laboratory* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016).

19. Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Literary Theory: An Anthology,* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan, 8–14 (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017).

20. Natalia Radywyl, Amelia Barikin, Nikos Papastergiadis, and Scott McQuire, "Ambient Aesthetics: Altered Subjectivities in the New Museum," in Henning, *International Handbooks of Museum Studies,* 3:421–23, 417.

21. John Smithies, qtd. ibid., 3:422.

22. For a detailed analysis of museums' role in tourism and heritage markets, see Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

23. Jennie Morgan, "Examining the 'Flexible Museum': Exhibition Process, a Project-Approach, and the Creative Element," *Museum and Society* 11, no. 2 (2013): 160.

24. Ibid.

25. Peter Griffin, president of Film Victoria, visited several museums in Europe and the United States to conduct research on contemporary exhibition trends. See Griffin, *Trip Report: London, Cannes, Dusseldorf, Berlin, London,* May 1996, General Correspondence Subject Files, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 11855/P0002/7.

26. Unfortunately, what can be found at the Public Record Office Victoria in Melbourne cannot give a complete picture of the imagined media technolo-

gies envisioned for the museum. In fact, many descriptions are of a rather short nature and speak more to a desire to develop something newer than concrete information on preproduction.

27. The most coherent summaries of these ideas can be found in *Building an Australian Centre for the Moving Image 1995,* Draft Proposal, May 1993, General Correspondence Subject Files, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 11855/P0002/2; *Australian Centre for the Moving Image Melbourne,* Report to Office of Major Projects, Department of Planning and Development, Victoria, September 1993, General Correspondence Subject File, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 11855/P0002/2; *Future Realities Gallery—An Exhibition of Screen Culture,* General Correspondence Subject Files, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 11855/P0002/7; *Cinemedia Screen Gallery Online,* General Correspondence Subject Files, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 11855/P0002/20; *Tomorrow's Picture: The Future of the Proving Image at Federation Square,* August 1998; John Smithies, *Screen Exhibition: Exhibiting the Present and the Future of the Moving Image on the Cinema Screen, Television Screen, Interactive Screen,* January 1998, General Correspondence Subject Files, Public Record Office Victoria, VPRS 11855/P0002/20.

28. For a detailed analysis of contemporary museums as media producers, see Jenny Kidd, *Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics* (Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate, 2014).

29. Eric Kluitenberg, "On the Archaeology of Imaginary Media," in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, Implications,* ed. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 48.

30. Ibid. Also see Eric Kluitenberg, "Second Introduction to an Archaeology of Imaginary Media," in *The Book of Imaginary Media: Excavating the Dream of the Ultimate Communication Medium,* ed. Eric Kluitenberg, 7–26 (Rotterdam: Debalie and NAi, 2006).

31. The AFI Research Collection at RMIT University holds an extensive collection of press clippings on ACMI. For the aforementioned criticism, see, among others, Ron Lowe, "My Say," *Herald Sun,* February 9, 2007; Corrie Perkin, "Centre Opts for Surround Screen," *Australian,* June 4, 2007; Greg Burchall, "Filmic Underdog Bites Image," *Age,* August 15, 2007.

32. Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?,* 138–141.

33. David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 12–45. For an analysis of how the basic story was adapted by museums, see Alison Trope, *Stardust Monuments: The Saving and Selling of Hollywood* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), 13.

34. Thomas Elsaesser, "The New Film History as Media Archaeology," *Cinémas* 14, no. 2–3 (2005): 90.

35. See "In the Future . . . What Do You Think Film, Television and All the Other Media We Enjoy Will Be Like in the Future?," https://www.flickr.com/photos/acmi/sets/72157623926405033/.