

Final Paper

Towards A Media Archaeology of Place:
A Genealogy of the Discursive Intersections of Media, Archaeology, Digital
Humanities and the City

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Introduction

Over the past decades, a significant new discourse has emerged within the fields of media history and theory known as "archaeology of media." Inspired by Michel Foucault's groundbreaking *Archaeology of Knowledge*, authors such as Friedrich Kittler, Sigfried Zielinski, and others have challenged traditional methods of media research with the aim of unsettling teleological arguments of technological history and progress. The primary action of this evolving mode of scholarship and practice has been in Europe, in particular Germany and the Netherlands. Concurrently, on the west coast of the United States at the Stanford Humanities and Metamedia Labs, Michael Shanks and Jeffrey Schnapp have been experimenting with the concept of "media archaeology" and "digital humanities." Trained as a traditional archaeologist (in the literal, non-Foucauldian sense), Shanks's work has focused upon addressing media within archaeological practice both as artifacts and tools, providing a basis for Schnapp's re-conceptualization of humanities scholarship in an age of ubiquitous digital mediation.

In this paper, I will sketch the contours of these distinct discursive currents surrounding the intersection of archaeology, media and the humanities. In order to tease out each author's conception of human agency *vis-à-vis* technical media, I will draw specific attention to the different approaches each takes towards imagining

the role of the artist in relation to the scholar and society at large. Finally, I will argue for a media archaeology of place, a new approach that focuses upon excavating the mediated image and sound of specific places. This will be made concrete through an outline and analysis of my work at the Harvard Graduate School of Design on the research and exhibition experiment "A Media Archaeology of Boston" (2008-2009)¹. My hope is to elucidate the theoretical potentialities latent within this collaborative project.

Archaeologies of Knowledge and Media: Foucault and Kittler

Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*, first published in French in 1969, has had a transformative effect across disciplines concerned with historical research. Impossible to categorize as exclusively a historian or philosopher himself, Foucault defines his archaeological project in juxtaposition to the conventional "history of ideas." In particular, his form of archaeological description draws a sharp contrast with traditional historical thought in its rejection of a search for origins and linear causality. Foucault describes the archaeological as "nothing more than a rewriting: that is, in the preserved form of exteriority, a regulated transformation of what has already been written. It is not a return to the innermost secret of the origin; it is the

¹ I curated "A Media Archaeology of Boston" with fellow Harvard PhD student Olga Touloumi, with additional support from Ernst Karel, Julie Mallozzi and Lucien Castaing-Taylor at the Film Study Center. The project is a result of our collective efforts, and thereby, so is this paper.

systematic description of a discourse-object."² An archaeology of knowledge is less concerned with specific historical influences, exchanges, transmitted information, or communications, but instead aims "to shift the level of attack of the analysis, to reveal what made them possible."³ For Foucault, there is no universal subject, but instead reigning vectors of power, articulated in a multiplicity of discursive formations in different times and places that constrain and determine human thought and action. The responsibility of the archaeologist is not to define "the thoughts, representations, images, themes preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but those discourses themselves."⁴

Traditional histories of science, technology, and media have tended to favor a linear, triumphal narrative of progress. The working assumption has been that one experiment has lead to another in strict, causal fashion, or that one technical media has been displaced by another. This approach not only suffers from blatant teleology and technological determinism, but also often sidelines the role of culture in shaping horizons of possibility for imagining technological change. Timothy Druckery describes this traditional historiography as "an orthodox itinerary uncluttered by speculation or dissent, unfettered by difference, disconnected from the archive,

² Michel Foucault, *The archaeology of knowledge: and the discourse on language*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972): 140.

³ Ibid: 161.

⁴ Ibid: 138.

averse to heterogeneity."⁵ In contrast, with Foucault's archaeological method in mind, it becomes possible to understand how distinct discursive formations, partially constituted by cultural practice, produce the contexts that enable specific technological development.

The aim of Foucault's archaeology is diversification, not totalization. He writes, "Archaeology is a comparative analysis that is not intended to reduce the diversity of discourses, and to outline the unity that must totalize them, but it is intended to divide up their diversity into different figures."⁶ Working from Foucault's archaeological perspective, history is no longer a scientific discipline concerned with piecing together an objective account of the past, but instead becomes a critical enterprise working backwards from the present to unearth the multiplicity of factors shaping the playing field of human thought and action at any particular moment in time. In some regards, Foucault's archaeology is a critique of a reductive form of humanist history, whereby individual actors are seen as rising above their time and place. For Foucault, all actions are circumscribed within power relations. Discourses themselves take on significant agency, and it is the archaeologist's job to shift the focus of critical investigation from individual actors to the frameworks and powers of discourses writ large. For Foucault, some of the most significant sites for uncovering discursive logics are archives.

⁵ Timothy Druckery, "Foreword," in Sigfried Zielinski, *Deep time of the media: toward an archaeology of seeing and hearing by technical means* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006).

⁶ Foucault, 159-160.

German media historian and theorist Friedrich Kittler has been at the forefront of deploying Foucault's archaeological method within media studies. Kittler begins his influential text, *Film, Gramophone, Typewriter* (first published in German in 1986) with the sentence: "Media determine our situation."⁷ Embracing Foucault's anti-humanist strain, Kittler argues that media are the material forms through which discursive formations are consolidated and communicated, thereby conditioning the fields of possible action within different historical periods. His archaeology of media digs into the discursive context of the 19th century, closely reading the literature of the period to gain access into the sensibilities that came to enable the rise of audio-visual recording devices, such as the gramophone and film.

Kittler's method of archaeology closely follows Foucault's. For Foucault, the most significant forms of disciplinary power become the institutional matrices of modernity and their discursive logics. In a strict Foucauldian world, there is nowhere outside the panopticon of organizational power. Kittler shifts this model of all-powerful forces onto an all-encompassing network of technical media.

While Kittler's method is strongly influenced by Foucault, he also draws heavily from the work of Marshall McLuhan. Underlying Kittler's claim that "media

⁷ Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999): xxxix.

determine our situation” is the idea that “machines have taken over the functions of the central nervous system.”⁸ This echoes McLuhan's argument that in the electric age, media are extensions of our bodies and nervous systems. Powerless in the face of technological forces, Kittler argues, “People take leave of their senses.”⁹ McLuhan similarly writes in his 1964 *Understanding Media*, “Our conventional response to all media...is the numb stance of the technological idiot.”¹⁰ However, there is a significant divergence between Kittler and McLuhan's thought in the context of sensory perception and human action.

For Kittler, the role of the artist or critical individual is demolished. He writes, “Media 'define what really is'; they are always already beyond aesthetics.”¹¹ In contrast, McLuhan establishes a privileged position for the artist. McLuhan writes, “The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception.... The artist is the man in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time. He is the man of integral awareness.”¹²

Kittler also subscribes to a privileged position for the artist, but as the register of

⁸ Ibid: 51.

⁹ Ibid: 2.

¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding media: the extensions of man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994): 18.

¹¹ Kittler, 3.

¹² McLuhan, 18 and 65.

discursive transformation, not as an agent that may also shape historical change. McLuhan's position, however, lives on in the work of Sigfried Zielinski, an other German media historian and theorist.

Anarchaeology of Media and Estrangement: Zielinski and Shklovsky

Zielinski has also worked extensively within the domain of an "archaeology of media." Like Kittler and Foucault, a primary impulse for Zielinski's methodology is a critique of teleology. He writes, "The history of the media is not the product of a predictable and necessary advance from primitive to complex apparatuses."¹³ Moreover, Zielinski imbues his position with a political critique of centralized power. At the center of his research is the cultivation of "dramaturges of difference," what he sees as an "effective remedy against the increasing ergonomization of the technical media worlds that is taking place under the banner of ostensible linear progress."¹⁴

However, unlike Kittler and media theorists such as Paul Virilio who articulate an exaggerated doomsday position, Zielinski does not believe technological's media close historical relationship to military investment and deployment necessarily determines their malicious effects. He writes, "Even in the media worlds that developed critically close to the spheres of power — telecommunications and

¹³ Sigfried Zielinski, *Deep time of the media: toward an archaeology of seeing and hearing by technical means*, translated by Gloria Custance (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006): 7.

¹⁴ *Ibid*: 259.

cryptography being cases in point — this other economy was also present: inventive, ingenious, and imaginative."¹⁵ In this respect, it is not surprising that, like McLuhan, the artist assumes a central place in Zielinski's work. For McLuhan, art serves to combat the shocks of technological change. He writes, "No society has ever known enough about its actions to have developed immunity to its new extensions or technologies. Today we have begun to sense that art may be able to provide such immunity."¹⁶ For Zielinski, the artist operates instead to defamiliarize and estrange us from technology (albeit while still using technical means). He writes, "If we are to learn from artists who have opted to play the risky game of seeking to sensitize us for the other through and with advanced technology, then gradually we must begin to turn around what is familiar."¹⁷ This approach echoes the theories of Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky, who developed the concept of *ostranenie*, known in English as estrangement or defamiliarization. In his 1917 essay "Art as Technique," Shklovsky writes, "Art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the

¹⁵ Ibid: 269.

¹⁶ McLuhan, 64.

¹⁷ Zielinski, 11.

artfulness of an object."¹⁸ For Zielinski, the archaeologist assumes the role of the artist, working through the sidepaths of media history to uncover surprising blips in the myth of progress, in the process estranging ourselves from forms of technological determinism. Discursive formations *a la* Foucault still retain significance; however, these structures exhibit cracks when dug up by Zielinski, as he chips away at the idea of all-encompassing media-technological-discursive power.

The Archaeological Imagination and Digital Humanities: Shanks and Schnapp

The discursive genealogy of media archaeology not only encompasses theories of archaeology inspired by Foucault, but also the work of classically-trained archaeologists who have spent as many years dealing with French theory as they have excavating sites of Greek ruins. In this domain, Michael Shanks, a Cambridge-trained archaeologist and classicist, is a leading figure. His academic and artistic work has been devoted to subverting entrenched positivist conceptions of the archaeological discipline. Drawing inspiration from a remarkably varied field of references, Shanks's conception of archaeology "stretches from genetics to art history, includes laboratory study, fieldwork and survey, statistical analysis, and textual interpretation, combining media old and new."¹⁹ Shanks aims to work in a

¹⁸ Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 1965): 12

¹⁹ Michael Shanks, "Archaeological manifesto," retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/112> on November 29, 2009.

constant double-movement between practice and research, whereby the academy becomes an art studio and “old disciplinary divisions give way to a committed address to matters of common human concern.”²⁰ With such an attitude, it is not surprising that Shanks sees Walter Benjamin as “one of the few historians who has dealt with this character of archaeological or material sources.”²¹ For Shanks, the *Arcades Project* is one of modernity’s greatest archaeological achievements, “a phantasmagoric collage of fragments, apparently unconnected remains of the life of a city.”²²

For Shanks, the core of archaeology is the interface between materiality and temporality. However, the discipline is not situated in the past, as some would believe, nor is it motivated by a drive to re-construct an imagined history. Instead, archaeology is concerned with the encounter of lived human experience and the past. Like memory, archaeology is performed in the actuality of the present, in a moment necessarily entwined with the past and projecting towards the future. Shanks writes, “Archaeology refers to ruination, the materiality which we are, to an order of temporality by which we are partially constituted. It deals with the gaps between things - the dirt which is trapped between floor tiles.”²³ Concerned with garbage and lacunae, the often-overlooked and seemingly ordinary, archaeology

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Michael Shanks, “Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past,” retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/227> on November 29, 2009.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

shifts attention to impressions and footprints, requiring an “ichnography — a science of traces.”²⁴ Defined as “material modes of engagement” and “mediators in the construction of knowledge,” media are central to this archaeological theory.²⁵ For Shanks, media archaeology implies working on the traces of a medium and using media to follow traces.

In Shanks’s thought, such a conception of archaeology coincides with a specific understanding of modernity. Echoing Andreas Huyssen, Svetlana Boym, and others, Shanks argues, “modernity is unthinkable without its museal and archaeological component.”²⁶ Going further, Shanks argues that in modernity “we are all archaeologists, even if we don’t realize it. We share now an archaeological sensibility - working on what is left of the past.”²⁷ But the archaeological sites of modernity are not only the remains of buildings, the legacy of monuments, the archives of political leaders. Instead, places like “landfill sites are modernity’s ruins,” along with the forgotten corners of a metropolis’ mediated image and sound, stored within media archives from libraries to the Internet.²⁸ In order for the archaeologist to engage modernity’s ruins, Shanks argues that one must deploy both an

²⁴ Michael Shanks, “The Archaeological Imagination,” retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/57> on November 29, 2009.

²⁵ Michael Shanks, “Media as modes of engagement,” retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/140> on November 29, 2009.

²⁶ Michael Shanks, David Platt, William L. Rathje, “The Perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological,” in *MODERNISM / modernity*, vol. 11, number 1 (2004): 64.

²⁷ Michael Shanks, “Archaeographer,” retrieved from <http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/44> on November 29, 2009.

²⁸ Shanks, “The Perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological”: 67.

"Archaeological Sensibility" and an "Archaeological Imagination." For him, "Sensibility refers us to the perceptual components of how we engage with the remains of the past. Imagination refers us to the creative component - to the transforming work that is done on what is left over."²⁹ The practice of archaeology is necessarily both scholarly and artistic, equally committed to historical analysis and projective imagination, requiring traditional methods of academic research and the creative application of new media and modes of engagement.

Shanks's theorization of a media archaeology has been furthered by his Stanford colleague Jeffrey Schnapp. In his "Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0," Schnapp argues for experimental curatorial practice assuming a central role in humanities-based scholarship. He writes, "Digital Humanists recognize curation as a central feature of the future of the Humanities disciplines. Whereas the modern university segregated scholarship from curation, demoting the latter to a secondary, supportive role, and sending curators into exile within museums, archives, and libraries, the Digital Humanities revolution promotes a fundamental reshaping of the research and teaching landscape. It recasts the scholar as curator and the curator as scholar, and, in so doing, sets out both to reinvigorate scholarly practice by means of an expanded set of possibilities and demands, and to renew the scholarly mission of museums,

²⁹ Michael Shanks, "The Archaeological Imagination."

libraries, and archives."³⁰ Almost 40 years separate Foucault from Schanpp. The media archaeologist within the digital humanities retains traces of Foucault's original theorization, but now, the archival troves open for excavation are vastly expanded to include digital warehouses, both of the past and the ever-evolving present. In addition, the "rewriting" that Foucault calls for may not only take the form of the written word, but may also be enacted through experimental curation and media exhibition.

Towards A Media Archaeology of Place

"A Media Archaeology of Boston" is a film, video and sound exhibition that uses the Boston metropolitan region as a laboratory for exploring different modes of urban representation across history and various media. The project aims to develop an experimental form of curatorial practice that treats all audio-visual material as documentary evidence of particular attitudes towards the relationship between media and space. "A Media Archaeology of Boston" proposes that the methodologies developed through the discursive trajectories of an "archaeology of media" can be expanded to offer a unique window into the past, present, and future of urban space. This media archaeology of place combines archaeology as metaphor and literal practice. Media artifacts become both the object of an archaeological dig, while simultaneously being re-worked as tools within new frameworks.

³⁰ Jeffrey Schnapp and other collaborators, "The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2.0," retrieved from <http://www.stanford.edu/~schnapp/Manifesto%202.0.pdf> on November 29, 2009.

The project began with the premise that Boston is a relatively under-represented city in the average person's mind. Metropolises such as New York, Los Angeles, Berlin or Paris are now canonical sites for investigating the intersection of media representation and the urban experience. While the site of many popular films, Boston is not considered to be a groundbreaking space in the history of urban media arts. However, it is precisely this almost banality and overlooked quality that makes Boston an ideal site for a media archaeological excavation. As Zielinski writes, the archaeological method necessitates that one "gallop off at a tangent."³¹ And in the case of examining the discursive formations of media representation, this means the well-trodden sites of mediated urbanism must be left on the sidelines. The premise of a media archaeology of place is precisely that media shape all spaces and places, not only those privileged sites of exceptional media production and innovation. This is true from the smallest towns across the country where local newspapers, online forums, and hobbyist historians dominant the media landscape, to a city like Boston, where its institutional history has fostered a surprisingly variegated history of spatial media production outside the bounds of conventional media networks.

A media archaeology of place insists, like an archaeology of media, on a plurality of media formats. As opposed to examining the history of a city as exclusively imagined

³¹ Zielinski, 28.

in film, painting or other classical topoi of urban media research, a media archaeology of place defines its excavation site broadly. "A Media Archaeology of Boston" brings together travelogue films from the early cinema; low-budget, documentary video; 1950s printed postcards; educational documentary; audio field recordings; citizen-produced YouTube clips; government marketing media; and black and white survey photographs. Per Foucault, such "archaeological comparison does not have a unifying, but a diversifying, effect."³² The objective is to disturb the technical, temporal, and aesthetic assumptions that underlie the narrowness of a medium-specific lens on a city.

"A Media Archaeology of Boston" consists of 28 pieces, each a tangible media materiality in VHS, Beta SP, 8mm, 16mm, 35mm and digital formats. Some of the media pieces are presented in whole, others are excerpted or edited. The ordering is not chronological or explicitly thematic, but instead poetically associative. There is a definitive logic to the media stream, but the aim is to foster surprising juxtaposition. As Zielinski writes, "Magical, scientific, and technical praxis do not follow in chronological sequence for an archaeology; on the contrary, they combine at particular moments in time, collide with each other, provoke one another, and, in this way, maintain tension and movement within developing processes."³³ The assemblage of media in this way calls into question assumptions of teleological

³² Foucault, 159-160.

³³ Zielinski, 258.

development, as well as neatly defined genre boundaries.

“A Media Archaeology of Boston” not only aims to destabilize conventional approaches to interpreting urban representation, it also works to reimagine the possibilities for curatorial practice and exhibition. Throughout the event, the space of the standard movie theater — rear projection of light onto a screen with a stereo system — is transformed into a venue for time-based multimedia exhibition.

Interspersed between the video and film pieces are a sequence of audio-only field recordings produced by the local Boston collective New England Phonographers Union. Ranging in length from three to five minutes, these sonic interventions jolt the audience from conventional modes of spectatorship. Accustomed to simply sitting and watching, the field recordings shift the register of experience towards the sensation of an event and live performance, drawing attention to the medium-specific conditions of the theatrical context itself.

Urban Destruction as Media Discourse

One of the sequences in the program addresses the recurring use of media to record urban destruction as popular spectacle and aesthetic sublime. Traversing four different media works, this segment deploys the archaeological method to uncover a specific discourse in the mediation of space. The sequence begins with *Combat Zone*, a short, community-produced video piece that examines the transformation of downtown Boston. In particular, the video juxtaposes present-day footage of

construction sites in the former Combat Zone, once the city's safe haven for pornography, with the destruction of the old Scollay Square, Boston's old Red Light district that was eradicated in the 1950s as a part of urban renewal. The historic material is composed of old snapshot images, along with grainy television news reports from the era. This piece is followed in the program by a short 3 minute film, *Railroad Smash-Up*. Shot in 1904, the film shows the staged collision of two outdated carriages in Revere, the growing amusement park district of the Boston metropolitan region. This short work of early cinema is a vivid illustration of Tom Gunning's concept of a "cinema of attractions," wherein the excitement of much early film was the potential to capture through technological media the spectacle of modern life, including new features of everyday industrial existence such as disaster. The rubble and smoke of this theatricalized crash then transitions to the rich, deep focus of *Boston Fire*, a piece by renowned avant-garde filmmaker Peter Hutton.

Created in 1979, *Boston Fire* is in explicit dialogue with the paintings of J.M.W. Turner. Hutton's film records a formless cloud of smoke arising from a real fire in the city of Boston and shows the efforts of firemen to tame it. A slow meditation, the film transforms this genuine disaster into an aesthetic work, whereby the visual qualities of smoke, water, and ruin become highly formalized and morph into sublime objects of beauty. Exploiting the liberties offered by a media archaeological method, this classic moment of art filmmaking then transitions into the 90 second

video *BOSTON FIRE - robbery mass house fire 1.22.04* by tonytwister18. Downloaded from YouTube, this final piece in the urban destruction sequence is a low-resolution, handheld video shot by an average citizen documenting a burning house in one of Boston's poorest neighborhoods. The formal elements mirror Hutton's, as firefighters also rush onto the scene to tame the fire and smoke. However, the aesthetic framing is radically different. Beyond the medium-specific distinctions between high-resolution 16mm film and cheap video technology, the soundtracks also create a dramatically different effect. Hutton's piece is silent, thereby further dramatizing the contemplative, sublime character of his painterly film. tonytwister18 places a soundtrack of loud death metal underneath his recording, giving the video a feeling of raucous voyeurism. Like *Railroad Smash-Up*, documented destruction becomes popular spectacle, but instead of a staged collision, the tragedy of everyday life in an urban ghetto is re-configured as entertainment online.

This close reading of these four media pieces within the larger program of "A Media Archaeology of Boston" illustrates the potential for this method of archival research and curatorial re-presentation to generate new insights into crucial historical and theoretical issues such as spectacle, the cinema of attractions, medium-specific boundaries, and aesthetic practices. In this way, "A Media Archaeology of Boston" demonstrates the surprising pathways that Thomas Elsaesser underscores in his essay on film history as media archaeology. He argues that a media archaeology

liberates "from their straight-jackets all those re-positionings of linear chronology that operate with hard binaries between, for instance, early cinema and classical cinema, spectacle versus narrative, linear narrative versus interactivity. Instead, film history would acknowledge its peculiar status, and become a matter of tracing paths or laying tracks leading from the respective 'now' to different pasts, in modalities that accommodate continuities as well as ruptures. We would then be mapping media-convergence and self-differentiation not in terms of either a teleology or a search for origins, but in the form of forking paths of possibility."³⁴

Beyond this sequence that complicates the relationships between avant-garde, early cinema, documentary, and contemporary media, "A Media Archaeology of Boston" also intermixes distinct modes of production. *Industry on Parade: Ropewalk!*, a 1950s industrial film commissioned by National Association of Manufacturers, is followed by its contemporary equivalent, *Welcome to Somerville*, a short promotional video produced by the city and its mayor to encourage local investment and development. Hollywood cinema is also not left out. The end of the program is a scene from *The Next Karate Kid* when the main character, Hillary Swank, is lead on top of MBTA trains by a love interest. As the two actors ascend the subways, the camera pans up to present a panorama of the city, a classic motif of urban representation. This classic happy ending not only playfully serves to draw attention to the narrative modes of Hollywood, it also echoes the opening of the program with

³⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, "The New Film History as Media Archaeology," in *Cinemas*, vol. 14, n° 2-3, Printemps 2004: 99.

Seeing Boston, 1906 travelogue shot from the back of a moving downtown streetcar.

Excavating Distinct Modes of Urban Representation

"A Media Archaeology of Boston" not only addresses media historical and theoretical issues, but also engages concerns of urban representation and the mediation of space. During the curatorial explorations for the project, we discovered an expansive archive of urban photographs created in the 1950s at MIT. Called *The Perceptual Form of the City*, the archive is the result of a collaboration between György Kepes, former colleague of László Moholy-Nagy in Berlin and the New Bauhaus in Chicago, and Kevin Lynch, professor of urban planning. This five-year research initiative aimed to understand how people experience the urban environment, both sensorially and cognitively. Together, Kepes and Lynch pioneered a variety of experimental methods, including engaging everyday citizens to draw mental maps of Boston, as well as working with photographer Nishan Bichajian to perform a series of pseudo-scientific photographic studies of the metropolitan region. Throughout the Copley Square neighborhood, Bichajian took photographs at precise 50 foot intervals, at each juncture snapping images looking down, looking straight ahead, and looking up from a "frog's eye view." These sequences portray the different physical layers of the city, as well as the hidden interstices, including back alleys. Amongst the over 1,800 photographs in the collection, we also uncovered categories such as "sidewalk patterns," where Bichajian, under the direction of Kepes and Lynch, documented cracks in the

pavement in an attempt to analyze the subconscious, material means by which the city communicated. In addition, the photographic survey focused upon "symbols." These included features of the cityscape such as a martini glass on a neon sign; a statue of a bull's head above an entrance to an apartment building; and advertisements for car batteries painted on the sides of delivery trucks. However, not all categories zoomed in on urban details and physical characteristics. The project also recorded "people in contact with their environment," with many shots showing children playing in fountains and old men sitting on benches. In the context of "A Media Archaeology of Boston," these black and white images are presented as a slideshow, as a whole evoking a structural approach to understanding the multiplicity of urban phenomena through photographic means.

Following the slides from *The Perceptual Form of the City*, the audience is presented with the 1966 16mm film *Le Corbusier Designs for Harvard*. Commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art and directed by Bruce Seth Green from the College of Architecture at Cornell, the work explores film as a tool for architectural analysis and pedagogy. Le Corbusier famously stated that film was the closest art to architecture, and that to properly understand his buildings, the unity of space and time offered by film enabled one to grasp the specific visual sequences he intended for his buildings' spectators. Whereas *The Perceptual Form of the City* used photography as a means for researching communication and perception, Seth Green's film deploys film in order to formally illustrate the interplay between light,

space and movement in Corbusier's only building in North America.

Conclusion

Since Foucault's groundbreaking *Archaeology of Knowledge*, the methodology of archaeology has become a powerful critical approach to historical research. This archaeological method initially focused upon articulating the specificities of discursive formations and exploring hitherto-unexamined archives. Media scholars quickly picked up Foucault's innovations, as media's role in storing, transmitting, and shaping discursive formations becomes the focus of writings by Kittler and others. As the archaeological method shifts from Foucault into media studies, the archival scope of excavation grows, the material and discursive history of media technologies now under investigation. Through the work of Sigfried Zielinski, Michael Shanks, and Jeffrey Schnapp, the media archaeologist is recast as an artist/scholar hybrid, aiming to defamiliarize the history and present of mediated experience.

I propose building off this foundation to develop a media archaeology of place, a new vehicle for archival research and curatorial experimentation within the evolving domain of the digital humanities. The practice of digging into the mediated image and sound of a physical space offers the potential for reflection on crucial issues of media history and theory, as well as a new rubric for analyzing, interpreting, and re-presenting urban change.

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