MALware Technical Report
Nostalgia vs. Retroactivity

Maureen Muse

Abstract

How can we account for the continued attraction of analog photography? Is it the direct physical engagement the photographer experiences with the camera when capturing one unique impression of time and light? Is it an emotional resonance created by a media that comes from the past? Perhaps it is inspired by the technical skills and artistry that the analog camera demands — even if many of them only ever required us to just point and shoot…

My work examines the nature of this attraction and questions why, and under what conditions, outmoded cameras still play such an important role in contemporary photography, alongside newer and more technically advanced models.

Entitled, "Nostalgia vs. Retroactivity', this work questions the emotional quality that is added with older medias. Specifically, it examines the nature of our emotional response to medias manufactured before the user was born, a reflexive, displaced and perhaps mistaken sense of nostalgia.

The camera that was used in this work was itself a family heirloom, which was altered with a set of custom designed filters over the lens. Each lenses was inscribed with the outlines of figures taken from photographs that had been taken with the same camera decades before. Many of the photographs in this work are photographs of photographs from a collection belonging to the previous user of this camera who captured these moments many years before.

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To better understand engagements with camera devices, this research has negotiated photography as a media under the scope of the research field of Media Archaeology's collective theories. Specific inquiries in this research have been better developed through key responses to retroactivity, obsolescence, artistic practices and hardware developments.

More specific to the developments of this research has been the notion of non-linear histories, an integral part of Media Archaeology and a central focus that has encompassed and filtered photography as a media case study in this research field.

In addition to theory-based research, this study has progressed through non-textual studies including the practice and experimentation of both analog and digital forms of photography to contextualize gathered information and complement new ideations applicable to an experimental case study. While following the proposed media theories specific to Media Archaeology, this study rather explores photography as a specific media vs. medias in entirety. In the same spirit as Media Archaeology where specific theories exemplary to specific disciplines are renegotiated and applied to different practices, the same will be done for photography.

Exploring the uses of various cameras as well as experimenting with imaging software, collecting old photographs and comparing photographic aesthetics to the hardware they produce better illustrate and challenge the understandings of this research. In the process of the textual research, non-textual research developed the conceptual frameworks for larger scale artistic work.

The root of this research sought to investigate contemporary practices of photography, why are less recently created forms of photography still prevalent and under what conditions do these "older" forms of photography exist along side "newer" versions. The idea of media as an a break from linear progression, an idea extracted from the theories and examples of artistic practice circulating in the research field of Media Archaeology has served as a cursor and experimental research method in meditating the conditions to which photography exists as a contemporary medium. Sub-topics all relevant and supported to theories of non-linear histories, have been taken from Media Archaeology, reorganized and developed to theorize photography as a non-linear history.

Short-term photographic projects were undertaken to developed the framework for a conceptual work. The practice compared the various current photographic trends as well as a practice of some deemed obsolete practices, for example the practice of dark room photography. Media Archeology as what could be considered a sub discipline or possibly sub-history of art of has been arranged through the thinking's of theorists like Errki Huhtamo, Siegfried Zielinski, Thomas Elsasser, Fredrich Kittler and to a certain degree, Michel Foucault each of who has been instrumental in the developments of this work. Moreover the ideas and articulated theories described by media theorist and scholar Jussi Parikka have pioneered a contemporary understanding of Media Archeology as an addition to cultural theory.

This collection of theories have transpired and existed at different points in time; multiples origins and conflicting ideas expressed by multiple scholars. The conditions to which these theories exist together, in contraction or accordance is only appropriate to the alternative and non-linear roots proposed and followed closely to the Foucauldian historical structure. This research practice looks at how we regard media histories, and follows the same non-discursive structure and the hidden or imagined program, allowing for imaginary media research.

The methodology, which could be understood as experimental and growing is in conjunction with the practice of Media Archaeology. To a degree without over complication or neglecting the very historical structure, the existence of research and practice are in some sort of relationship with each other, to say that new research methods mediate for new art practices or vice versa. These alternative histories of media or as Jussi Parikka describes in *What is Media Archaeology,* the "Spirit of thinking the old and the new in parallel lines" have been imagined and created as "models of the possible" by artists.

As a cursor to examine photographic practices through research and experiments, the over arching non- linear ideas of Media Archaeology is what has been the key to the development of new ideas to reassess and question media theory. All while staying in the scope of and following the existing ideas, photography will insist on the material nature and non-narrative frameworks. Rather than examine photography as solely an example media in a cultural or social analysis, important examination will be formulated more so by non-human agencies in modern media mediated by Media Archaeology.

Components and topics to which will be covered by photography existing in a non-linear history will be supported by related theories to software studies, German media theory, new materialism and digital humanities. In an effort to reveal a more concise placement and understanding the developments of cameras and photographic practices, through discontinuity it would require first theoretical framework for this concept. The method to which this research has been conducted begins first by applying and examining the theories of archaeological knowledge and history of the ideas.

The final work in this research was meant to present the intersection of the cultural and technological questions developed in the initial stages of the study. However Media Archaeology is a shift from the cultural and identity as a tool for media theory, the final work for this study extracted personal questions dealing with issues of identity and emotional attachments to media and responses to these questions with the non-discursive or non-narrative artifacts of a device.

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The research field of Media Archaeology, a sub-discipline of Media History, has provided my research method in examining the parallels and coexistence of contemporary and outmoded media, and this illogical break in the usual linear progress of technology. Rather than study the histories of media in cultural contexts, this is a mode of study focused on non-linear and non-discursive histories as well as material software. Theories presented in Media Archaeology require histories to be understood through the technological nature of the media, the software and the actual material structure of the devices. My work was driven by a number of initial research questions rooted in cultural narratives and research findings that centered on these non-discursive histories.

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The camera that was used in this work was itself a family heirloom, which was altered with a set of custom designed filters over the lens. Each lenses was inscribed with the outlines of figures taken from photographs that had been taken with the same camera decades before. Many of the photographs in this work are photographs of photographs from a collection belonging to the previous user of this camera who captured these moments many years before.

The layered image that results might seem at first to have come from the memory of the inanimate device itself. However, it reminds us that the camera is not just as a means of documenting subjects in the present; it is itself a bridge between all of its past users. (see image 1 and 2 from exhibition).

Image 1
From Nostalgia vs. Retroactivity
Photographic print
60 x 80 cm

Image 2
From Nostalgia vs. Retroactivity
Photographic Print
60 x 90 cm

Reflection:

 This study was one of the more challenging undertakings in my academic career. I ran circles with understanding the theories and complications of Media Archaeology. The questions that drove the decision to complete this research were personal and required a level of self-interrogation, which is what Media Archaeology removes from media theory and rather requires the emphasis on the artifact and the physical material.

 The analog camera that I used as an artifact for this research belonged to my mother when she was the same age as me. This camera is a family heirloom, one I identify with and have chosen over other cameras to continue to use. Under the questions I had proposed before, why do "we" use less recent forms of camera, I really began with why do "I". While developing the ideas and responses to this question it was important to remove and maintain a level of self to push as much as I could a more developed response. It would not have been possible to develop this work without taking risks and

allowing for a level of confidence in understanding and expressing my response to form the larger scale work, "Nostalgia vs. Retroactivity".

This experience has been invaluable in understanding the importance and thoroughness involved in research and practice. There were times when my work and textual research was far too ambitious. Many complications can arise from extracting various materials from different sources. It became necessary for me to take time with the research and absorb the material to then use it for my own discussion about this work. In completion of this research and practice I feel accomplished in understanding the relationship and visibility of subjective and objective views allowed in my work. I hope to continue to practice research methods that set the framework for conceptual works as well as foster the personal questions and self-interrogation I could project in my work.

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