# Chapter 2 Transmedia Archaeology: From principles to practice

Key words: media archaeology; discourse; materiality; media technology; archive; digital memory; topos ; research tools; disciplinarity; transmedia archaeology

This book seeks to investigate an aspect of the contemporary film experience that is both ubiquitous and invisible at the same time. Today film promotional sites have become so commonplace that they are taken for granted. Indeed, today we would consider it odd if a film did not have a website. Since their emergence in the 1990s, these online promotions have settled into a recognisable standardised format. Typically, an ‘official’ site will be located on a production company, studio, or distributor’s hub in a portfolio of forthcoming releases, similar to a department store shop window display. Sites like this host essential information including the film’s synopsis, list of credits, a gallery of images and clips, the film’s trailer, links to social media, and geolocated information on local cinemas showing the film. But while this format has become commonplace, this ubiquity belies the fact that film sites are culturally invisible, regarded as banal commercial materials and invariably overlooked by film scholarship, journalism, and criticism, which, *de facto*, renders them invisible.

Not all film sites follow this standard press kit information format. The site for Wes Anderson’s *The Grand Budapest Hotel* provides an illustration of this as it is diegetically situated within the film’s storyworld. It takes the shape of an in-world companion to the film, set in the fictional alpine republic of Zubrowka somewhere around the start of the 20th century where visitors are greeted with the following announcement:

*‘The republic of Zubrowka possesses a rich heritage known only to the few who have thought to seek it out..until now. For the first time ever, you can explore the detailed political, cultural, and artistic world of 20th century Zubrowka at the Akademie’s historical archive. Learn about the military coup of 1935, the involvement of the Grand Budapest Hotel and a roving cast of characters that make up its intricate past.’* (2014)

Designed in concert with the tone and aesthetic of the film’s time period, the site is viewed via a simulated microfiche machine, lens loader and navigational wheel to move through the digital ‘slides.’ Its fictional world is presented in the shape of a pre- First World War-style educational course titled ‘ The Republic of Zubrowka, before the war: A central European Case Study of social, political and cultural upheaval’ consisting of a syllabus of three courses about the history and culture of this make-believe country. It is accompanied by annotated portraits of the main characters, and feature some of the film’s key props: from ornate hotel room keys and Mendl Patisserie trademark pink cake boxes to the painting at the centre of the film’s plot of a boy with apple and the men’s fragrance, L’air de Panache Pure Musk (rumoured to be the preferred scent of Gustave H (Ralph Fiennes), concierge at the Grand Budapest Hotel (Watson DG, 2017). When extracted from their narrative context, these properties assume an iconicity that renders the film’s world recognisable, even if the viewer has not yet seen the film.

As well as the fictional world of Zubrowka conveyed through the curriculum of the Akademie, scrolling down the film site’s home page brings the viewer to a link which takes them to the Zubrowka Film Commission on Tumblr. This in-world Film Commission site contains a calendar containing the fictional country’s upcoming events including everything from national holidays like the Zubrowka’s *Ziegenfest*, as well as weather forecasts providing temperatures, wind speeds and snow alerts. The commission proclaims itself to be ‘the preeminent authority on International film production in Zubrowka since 1922’ and extolls the virtues of the country as a ‘grand destination featuring a film-friendly community, luxurious locations, and free production space’ playfully walking the line between the film’s diegesis and its production.

World building continues in the production diary blog with diegetic infographics on the benefits of working in Zubrowka covering the country’s wildlife, landmarks, history, and art. While key plot points are reported as headline stories on the front pages of Zubrowkan newspapers. Following the blog back in time, the film’s key characters, and ensemble of stars to play them, plot twists and properties are all introduced. There is a post on the secrets of the Society of the Crossed Keys and a playful riff on the film’s capers investigating a murder, counselling readers in step 1 to ‘Narrow down your suspects by eliminating members of the upper class’. Reading back through the blog entries the film site steps outside the film’s diegesis documenting the making of the film in production diary posts, images from the shoot and behind the scenes features, formally associated with DVD extras but even this is clothed in the guise of the film commission’s welcome to the film director, his cast and crew to the make-believe country.

The site was designed by the digital marketing agency Watson Design Group in collaboration with Wes Anderson. It was well regarded by the industry and won a number of accolades including a bronze at the *Clio* advertising awards in 2014 and a *Webby* for best film website in 2015. But a survey of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) database shows that commentary on Anderson’s work covers every aspect of the film’s production but little consideration has been given to the website and it is conspicuous by its absence in the scholarship. To illustrate this neglect it is interesting to look at Donna Kornhaber’s book on *Wes Anderson* in the University of Illinois’s Contemporary Film Director’s series where she recognises how Anderson’s films are notable for their ‘superabundance of *ancillary* material’ and nods to the ‘aftermarket *ephemera* of paintings and websites’ that augment Anderson’s filmic worlds (My italics, 2017:137). Kornhaber goes on to note Anderson’s carefully curated DVD *extras* moved online with the advent of the internet and recognises the ‘elaborate’ scale of the film websites but stops short of investigating what it actually contains or what purpose they fulfil. Indeed, arguably Kornhaber’s description of the site as ‘educational videos’ about the fictional world misses an opportunity to develop her otherwise compelling thesis about how Anderson’s films illustrate the sensibilities of a collector.

So a significant element of the *Grand Budapest Hotel* experience remains barely recognised or discussed. This bears out the concerns voiced by Geoffrey Long in a presentation at a *Futures of Entertainment* conference hosted by the MIT Convergence Culture Consortium titled ‘How to Ride a Lion: A Call for a Higher Transmedia Criticism.’ In it he bemoans the dearth of critical attention to the transmediated features of contemporary media and makes the case for the development of a critical language for transmedia, akin to that for cinema (2011a). Further to this he calls for ‘transmedia reviews,’ much like film reviews, to broaden audience awareness of this multiplatform experience; as well as ‘transmedia criticism’ to nurture a better critical understanding of transmedia practices by academics, as the meticulously crafted paratexts like Akademie Zubrowka clearly contribute to the film experience(2011a).

This instance seems to support Long’s call for the critical appraisal of these transmedia artefacts, and the concern is that the consequence of critical invisibility is that film websites are vulnerable to becoming part of what has been described as the ‘vanishing present’[[1]](#footnote-1) . Once these sites have fulfilled their function as a promotional vehicle for the film as it journeys through its release windows and onto home viewing formats and streaming platforms, they are deemed to be of no further use, have no real value and are effectively rendered redundant. As a result, they are often unceremoniously taken down from the web to make space for the promotion of the next releases and disappear. So, my concern is that while sites are designed alongside other transmedia components of a production, they are often discarded, even before they have been appraised for their contribution to the film experience.

While the overarching aim of this book is to investigate the development of film promotional sites, from the start this investigation comes up against a number of challenges that need to be acknowledged. First, there is the challenge of *low value and status*. While this book contends that the most inventive film websites constitute a new form of storytelling, because they are not paid for, they are still widely regarded as just ancillary paratextual forms and considered only in relation to film as the core text, rather than content contributing to a textual ecology. Consequently, little consideration is given to their role in relation to the films they accompany and it appears that film promotional sites are suffering the same fate as other cinematic ephemera, disappearing without trace once their promotional role is ended, as film posters and trailers once did.

The second challenge is connected to the first and concerns their *ephemerality*. The lifespan and longevity of film sites is determined by their relational function as a form of marketing and promotion to film. However, unlike films which are broadcast and streamed on various platforms, as well as retailed on DVD and Blu-ray and continue to generate profit for their producers, film sites have no intrinsic value in their own right. No-one pays at the box office to see a film site. So when their task is done, film websites are frequently just taken down in the spirit of good digital housekeeping by the film’s producers to make way for the next release.

The third challenge relates to *materiality*. Web-borne artefacts are particularly vulnerable to a number of threats relating to their ontological condition. For the few examples which can still be found online, their digital materiality makes them vulnerable to the perils of link rot and outdated, no longer accessible software . Moreover, there is no road map of the internet, so even if they do still exist on the web, where are they? How can they be located? What tools can be used to find them? The fourth and final challenge relates to *authorship*. With the advent of second-generation technologies, transmedia experiences designed around websites are not solely authored by their producers and designers. Co-creation with audiences brings with it questions about how such cultural forms can be studied especially when such experiences are time sensitive, operating through and around social networks and real-time events, analysis becomes increasingly challenging.

So, whilst the initial intention of my research was to explore the development of film sites to address the questions outlined in the introduction, it became clear that before undertaking an examination of these media artefacts it would be necessary to define a research methodology that could address these challenges. It was for this reason that the investigation turned to media archaeology.

**2.1** **Media Archaeology– First Principles**

Media archaeology is a relatively new approach to studying media history and although its exponents sometimes adopt the lexicon of conventional archaeology, by referring to ‘fragments,’ ‘excavations’, ‘stratigraphy’ and such like, this relationship has been largely confined to metaphor as it does not really recognise archaeology as its progenitor at all (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:3). Indeed, archaeologists-as-such[[2]](#footnote-2) ( a name used to distinguish the original discipline from this new approach) have bemoaned the fact that:

‘The actual engagement of disciplinary archaeology within this movement has been reduced to a series of convenient illustrations for practice rather than constituting a practice of examination in itself’ (Wilson, 2015:72).

Advocates of media archaeology assert the emerging field should not be conflated with or confused with the discipline of archaeology because their areas of enquiry and the focus of their interests are quite distinct (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:3):

‘media archaeology should not be confused with archaeology as a discipline. When media archaeologists claim that they are ‘excavating’ media cultural phenomena, the word should be understood in a specific way. Industrial archaeology for example, digs through the foundations of demolished factories, boarding houses, and dumps, revealing clues about habitats, lifestyles, economic and social stratifications, and possibly deadly diseases. Media archaeology rummages textual, visual, and auditory archives as well as collections of artifacts, emphasising both the discursive and the material manifestations of culture.’(Ibid.)[[3]](#footnote-3)

However, given that these two fields of study do share the same designation, it may provide a helpful starting point to understanding media archaeology by considering what they share in common. In a special edition of *the Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* about the intersections between archaeology and media archaeology, Parikka asserted the first point of commonality between them is a shared interest in materiality and material culture (Parikka, 2015:9). He writes, ‘it is the interest in the fragment, trace, and ruin that seems to bind the two fields’ (Ibid.). Moreover, whilst traditionally as a discipline archaeology has focussed on deep time, increasingly today both share a fascination with the contemporary too (Ibid.). So, we see media archaeologists researching the programming languages and HTML code of an English heritage website for Stonehenge[[4]](#footnote-4), while archaeologists-as-such are equally at home excavating the Atari burial ground in New Mexico[[5]](#footnote-5) and computer hard drives as part of the *Media Archaeology Hard Drive* Project (MAD-P) at the University of York (2015:9). So, perhaps a more productive way to understand the relationship between the fields is not to seek out grand theoretical narratives of common knowledge but rather to consider the techniques and practices they share as well as the objects of analysis they focus on ( Bernhard Siegert in Parikka: 2015: 9). For example, clearly the fields seem to share an interest in excavation, whether in the ground or the archive, as well as the acts and apparatuses of observation and measurement and a shared enthusiasm for dismantling and reconstructing technologies.

Two key publications have played a significant role in defining and mapping the emerging field of media archaeology: *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011), and its companion volume published the following year, *What is Media Archaeology*? (Parikka, 2012). The author of both volumes, Jussi Parikka claims the 2011 anthology to be the first collection of writings to be published in the field of media archaeology (in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:2). It brings together a collection of essays under the umbrella title of media archaeology, although he does readily acknowledge that the authors themselves do not necessarily regard their work, primarily, as media archaeology (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:2). They include Walter Benjamin, Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, Ernst Robert Curtius and Marshall McLuhan, who are discussed in the introduction to the collection by Parikka as part of a genealogical mapping of the field’s predecessors but these writers are often considered to sit within other disciplines, and even transdisciplinary contexts (Goddard, 2015:1763). However, the reason Parikka brought these writings together in one volume is because he considers these collective writings represent the range of philosophical perspectives in this emerging area of academic enquiry, and proposes media archaeology as a fresh approach to media history:

‘Media archaeology is not a school of thought or a specific technique but is an emerging attitude and cluster of techniques in contemporary media theory that is characterised by a desire to uncover and circulate repressed or neglected media approaches and technologies’ (2010).

As well as tracing the field’s antecedents, Huhtamo and Parikka’s anthology includes scholarship that is more directly regarded as having a media archaeological sensibility including the work of Michel Foucault, Friedrich Kittler, Siegfried Zielinski, Wolfgang Ernst, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Erkki Huhtamo and others (2011).

What these different writers share, Parikka explains, is a concern about how histories come to be written, as well as constructing ‘alternate histories of suppressed, neglected, and forgotten media’ which have been side-lined by the conventional teleological narratives of media histories which end with ‘the present media-cultural condition as their ‘perfection’ (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:3). It is these sentiments which seem to be particularly appropriate to a research projects undertaking a historical examination of the hybrid form of content and promotion found in film sites (Ibid.). So, it is from this loose affiliation of critical writings known as media archaeology that this book draws its methodological foundations. Although Parikka cautions that practical models of how to undertake media archaeology cannot straightforwardly be derived from these writings, he suggests that these writings *afford* ways of theorising media history (Hertz, 2010).

On reading these seminal writings it becomes clear that a media archaeological approach does not derive from the work of a single authoritative source. Neither is there any clearly defined discipline, journal or school that could be seen as central to media archaeology. However there does appear to be a spectrum of approaches within the field. Wolfgang Ernst makes distinctions between, on the one hand what he terms ‘radical media archaeology’ and, on the other , the kinds of media archaeology that adopt the ‘soft archaeological metaphor’ (2015). For him, radical media archaeology is characterised by investigation of technical (and symbolic) operativity of the processes of media artefacts and what he terms the ‘technological conditions of the cultural enunciation’, as distinct from the essentially metaphorical descriptors adopted by ‘soft media archaeology’ which is more in line with Bruce Sterling’s notion of ‘dead media’ in a project concerned with what has been neglected in the historiography of culture and technology.

Despite the lack of established academic turf, it is interesting to note that media archaeology does have a *Facebook* group site administered by Jussi Parikka, Garnet Hertz and Eda San which boasts a membership of nearly 10,000[[6]](#footnote-6) indicating how media archaeology has resonated with many in the both the academic and art world, and holds considerable currency at present (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:2). The co-editors of *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, Parikka and Huhtamo state:

‘Although this term does designate an academic discipline (there are no public institutions, journals or conferences dedicated to it), it has appeared in an increasing number of studies, and university courses and lectures have also been given under this heading. As their highly divergent syllabi and reading lists testify, there is no general agreement about either the principles or terminology of media archaeology. Yet the term has inspired historically tuned research and is beginning to encourage scholars to define their principles and to reflect on their theoretical and philosophical implications’(Ibid.)

Indeed, Parikka points out that media archaeology is not confined to one discipline and should be regarded as a ‘travelling discipline’ (Ibid.). In an interview with Garnet Hertz, published in the academic journal, *CTheory*, Parikka offers up a development on the definition of this emerging field,

‘Media archaeology exists somewhere between materialist media theories and the insistence on the value of the obsolete and forgotten through new cultural histories that have emerged since the 1980s. I see media archaeology as a theoretically refined analysis of the historical layers of media in their singularity – a conceptual and practical exercise in carving out the aesthetic, cultural and political singularities of media’ (Hertz, 2010).

It is these contentions which seem to provide a fresh approach to the examination of media history and are particularly apposite to an artefact whose fate is so often to be disregarded and discarded.

So, where to begin? While Parikka’s collections of writings respond to the challenge of interpreting the past in different ways, at its core, it would be true to say that media archaeology is shaped by two European figures: the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, and German literary and media theorist, Friedrich Kittler, who between them represent the spectrum of ways of thinking that characterise the field (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:8). Given their influence on much of the writing and practice in the area, it is useful to consider the theories of these scholars, to establish how each conceives their guiding principles for understanding the past, which have determined the ambit of media archaeological thought. Then, through a distillation of media archaeological principles into practical tools to undertake the investigation and reveal the singularities of this emergent form.

**The discourse principle**

Michel Foucault’s approach to history, historiography and understanding the past finds its clearest articulation in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). Foucault observes that it is common to reference historical times conceptually in terms of what he calls temporal ‘unities’ such as ‘periods’ or ‘centuries’ (2002:4). However, he suggests that these unities are principally designed to cultivate narrational coherence rather than relate to the ‘actualities of the past’ (Ibid.). He goes on to critique historiography’s preoccupation with tropes like origins, traditions and what he refers to as ‘the discourse of the continuous’ - all of which are often accepted without question, but are regarded by Foucault as a ‘plastic [artificial] continuity’ (2002, 13;167). He is sceptical about chronological accounts of the past too, with their implied temporary relations of cause and effect which he describes as little better than a ‘crude calendar’ (2002:184). In sum, he advises that we should be suspicious of accounts of the past that include such ‘readymade syntheses,’ as, he argues, they transform all encounters with the past into predominantly linear narratives and are preoccupied with these discursive imperatives at the expense of better understanding the underlying drivers that construct events and attitudes (Foucault: 2002:24).

It should be noted that Foucault does not discuss the media *per se* in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. However he does discuss how a subject is constituted by all the statements that are made about it at a given time which he terms ‘discourse’ so, by inference if not example, Foucault considers the means of communication (Hertz, 2010; Foucault 2002:34). Considering this principle of discourse further, Foucault argues that discourse does not just describe, but actually constructs what we know about a subject, thereby defining and producing the object of knowledge (2002:36). Indeed discourse, he argues, determines the way a topic can be meaningfully talked about, and, in turn, this influences how ideas are put into practice (Ibid.) Foucault argues that the clearest illustration of the operation of discourse can be seen in a diachronic analysis of what constitutes the knowledge about an object and how it changes over time (2002:35-36).

Returning to his critique of the conventions of historiography, Foucault maintains the problem with such discursivity is that it elides any awareness of the construction or indeed the contingency of how we know what we know about the past (Foucault, 2002:45). This is a concern reiterated by Parikka with regards to media histories when he writes:

‘The past has been visited for facts that can be exciting in themselves, or revealing for media culture at large, but the nature of these ‘facts’ has often been taken as a given and their relationship to the observer and the temporal and ideological platforms he or she occupies left unproblematised’ (2011:1-2).

To counter these concerns, Foucault proposes an ‘archaeological’ approach to examining the past (2002:155). From the perspective of this discussion about media archaeology, Foucault’s idea of archaeology is conceptual rather than literal. He is less concerned with examining the physical artefact, than uncovering the discursive formations which frame and condition our understanding of the past.

Foucault’s proposition is that knowledge is knowable, in effect, by what is ‘said’ about it and in the most fundamental sense this applies to the naming of things (2002:54). If we look at the multitude of terms by which film websites are described including ‘transmedia’ (Jenkins 2006:20), ‘cross media’ (eds. Ibrus and Scolari 2012:7), ‘cross-media promotion’ (Hardy, 2010), ‘transvergent’ (Transvergence Summit, 2013), ‘ephemera’ (Grainge in ed. Grainge, 2011:2), ‘paratexts’ (Gray, 2010:6) and ‘viral marketing’ (Ndalianis, 2012:129), we immediately get a clear sense of some of the features of the cultural artefact under consideration in this book. Prefixes like ‘cross,’ ‘trans’ and ‘multi’ indicate that what we are looking at is not medium-specific but operates between and across other media forms. However, Foucault’s proposition is not confined to words because evidently what is being ‘said,’ in the discursive sense, extends beyond nomenclature to include organisations, institutions, and industries too (2002: 54).

To illustrate. In the BBC’s 2007 ‘multiplatform strategy’ we have an example of media institutions developing policies around and formalising transmedia extensions of television programmes (Grainge, 2011:107-8). Then in 2010 the Producers’ Guild of America (PGA) instituted a new credit for ‘transmedia producer’ that formally recognised these new practices (Producers’ Guild of America, 2010). Since then film festivals like New York’s Tribeca (2013) together with Toronto and Berlin have recognised the emergence of transmedia in their award categories, and Sundance has a lab devoted to its development, and the National Film Board of Canada set up a fund for transmedia projects (Anderson, 2013). The development of the creative industries became a dominant theme in cultural policy making in the European Union which in practical terms translated into funding initiatives to encourage the development of convergent creative industries through the creative Europe programme, regional development funds , and calls in the research and development programme, *Horizon*, 2020 (Ibrus and Ojamaa, 2020: 91) A survey of nomenclature at a lexical, as well as an institutional level is an illuminating strategy for tracking the development of the concept of transmedia and clarifying how film websites are understood. As was evident in the previous chapter’s examination of the term transmedia, usage of the term can be mapped over a period to illustrate how ‘statements’ about transmedia have evolved and therefore how understanding of the concept develops (Foucault, 2002:90).

To return to the subject under consideration in this book then, Foucault’s discursive principle provides a way of considering media objects like film websites, not just on their own but in relation to one another, within a field, as well as the wider context of institutions like the BBC, the National Film Board of Canada and industry bodies like the Producer’s Guild of America (2002:46). Foucault goes on to say that names may give us clues about the ontology of the object, but it is relations which govern and determine who speaks, from which perspective, and from whence they acquire their legitimacy to speak (2002:49-50). Although having established the parameters of this principle of discourse, Foucault cautions that we still can never know the past in its totality. But what this principle can offer to historical research is an understanding of ‘regions’- specific sites excavated by the investigation (Foucault, 2002:148). With this principle the value of embarking on an investigation of particular discursive trends, whilst not in themselves able to offer a complete picture of the past, may provide insight.

Foucault’s adoption of archaeological idiom is in some ways paradoxical, as was said before, his approach is conceptual rather than physical and does not extend to a consideration of the material artefact which we conventionally associate with media archaeology. Nevertheless, this concept has been picked up and applied to media archaeological investigations by Errki Huhtamo as we shall see later in the section describing the topos principle. Moreover, these limitations are compensated for by the second theoretical principle underpinning media archaeology derived from the work of the Friedrich Kittler and others, collectively known as German media theory.

**The materiality principle**

The rationale for Kittler’s principle about the materiality of the media is succinctly summed up in the opening sentence of the preface to his book *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*,- ‘media determine our situation which - despite or because of it- deserves a description’ (1999:1). In many ways Kittler shares Foucault’s interest in excavating the conditions in which knowledge arises and builds on the concept of ‘discursive formation.’But rather than excavating discursivity and meaning, heis more interested in the technological conditions of communication media. As a literary scholar by training, Kittler is concerned that historically both literary and media studies tend to overlook the fact that all acts of expression are embedded in material channels (Kittler, 1999:18). Commentators on Foucault’s work have observed that whilst he is interested in how libraries and archives shape what we know, his interest does not extend to the consequences of storage and recording technologies deployed in these settings on the discursive formations of knowledge at all (Winthrop-Young, 2011:59). Kittler’s critique of Foucault is that his work only refers to written archival sources and there is no acknowledgement that writing is but one medium among others, and had already been superseded by media communications at the time when Foucault was writing *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in 1969. Moreover, interestingly Foucault died in 1984 just before the advent of the digital revolution and Kittler notes:

‘Even writing itself, before it ends up in libraries, is a communication medium, the technology of which the archaeologist [Foucault] simply forgot. It is for this reason that all his analyses end up immediately before that point in time at which other media penetrated the library stacks. Discourse analysis cannot be applied to sound archives or towers of film rolls’ (Kittler, 1999:5).

In short then, Kittler’s argument is that Foucault’s discursive principle needed to give greater recognition to the materiality of the media. So how does Kittler do this? His archaeological approach to media history is set out in the *Discourse Network* series where he traces the implications of the shift from the predominantly symbolic systems and significations of writing and print to the mechanical processes of analogue media which process the physical effects of the real (1992). Former colleagues of the late Kittler and editors of his posthumously collected works, Tania Hron and Sandrina Khaled have written about the way Kittler elected to represent his literary analysis in graphic forms to counter the assumption that literature could be understood predominantly as the bearer of meaning, and in its place recognise how a text is primarily a communication network (2015:108). Kittler later reflects on this shift, first to mechanical and later to digital communications media and writes, ‘Science is for the first time in possession of a machine that records noises, regardless of so-called meaning’ (Kittler, 1999:85). It is at this point he asserts that ‘art gives way to media’ and consideration of aesthetics should be superseded by a consideration of technical features (Winthrop-Young, 2011:60). In sum then, Kittler’s media archaeology focuses pre-dominantly on non-human, non-visual elements such as software and hardware as well as storage, distribution, and processing.

The reason Kittler’s work matters is because it critiques the long-standing technological oversight in media studies, by insisting on a consideration of materiality of media. He examines the material conditions of media technologies across a wide range of media texts, from Bram Stoker’s gothic novel *Dracula* (1897) to the lyrics of Pink Floyd’s *Dark Side of the Moon* (1973) (Kittler, 1999:86 and 36-7). From this he observes that increasingly media operate independently of humans, and concludes that neither are reducible to content, nor their social or cultural condition (Parikka, 2012:68). In other words, media are not just stories, or visual representations of the world, but machines whose technical affordances shape the audience experience too (Ibid.). It has been argued that the wider implication of Kittler’s brand of media archaeology is that it builds on the Lacanian premise that we do not speak language, it speaks us (Winthrop-Young, 2011, 34). From this perspective, media technologies are better regarded as regimes rather than languages, which we must accommodate ourselves to, in order to be functioning subjects in society (Parikka, 2012:70). Moreover, it follows that when we subject ourselves to them, these technological regimes do not just provide agency, but also power (Ibid.). As Parikka notes, Foucauldian concepts of power have been transferred from 19th-century institutions like clinics and prisons to the hardware, software, protocols, and circuits of the digital media systems of today (Ibid.).

Taken together, the perspectives outlined here by Michel Foucault and Friedrich Kittler mark out the spectrum of fundamental concerns that characterise what has become known as media archaeology from the discursive principle to the material principle. What follows in the next section is a consideration of the principles that can be derived from a selection of media archaeological writings that are pertinent to the concerns of this investigation of the development of the film website. The concluding section of the chapter will then outline how these epistemological principles inform the methodological toolkit used for analysis in each of the remaining chapters in the book.

**The media technology principle**

The long-standing neglect of materiality in the Humanities has not gone unnoticed by others too. American Literary scholar, N. Katherine Hayle’s notes:

‘Within the Humanities and especially in literary studies, there has traditionally been a sharp line between representation and the technologies producing them. Whereas art history has long been attentive to the material production of the art object, literary studies has generally been content to treat fictional and narrative worlds as if they were *entirely* products of the imagination’ (2002:19). (My italics)

Moreover, British media scholar Michael Goddard points out that this deficiency persists. He observes that the ‘geological strata that underlie technical media systems and networks are frequently ignored by conventional media studies’ (2015:1761). In response to this shortcoming, Parikka asserts that media archaeology can open new ways of thinking about materiality which may provide insight (Parikka, 2016: xxxii). He proposes that media archaeology may enable media studies to break away from ‘the hegemony of representation analysis’ which has been the main concern of the discipline for so long (Parikka, 2016: xxxi).

As film websites are grounded in technically mediated materiality and computational processes there is a need to recognise these issues. These shortcomings in media studies became the focus of interest for a group of scholars known as the ‘Berlin group,’ the best known of whom is, perhaps, Wolfgang Ernst. Ernst founded the *Media Archaeological Fundus* at Berlin’s Humboldt University, where he made a collection of ‘zombie media’ that still function even though the world in which they were operational has long disappeared, such as telephony apparatus, TV sets and early computers(Owens, 2013)[[7]](#footnote-7). By examining these old, often obsolete machines first hand rather than generating a sense of nostalgia for past media, Ernst advocates using them as tools for media archaeology to analyse aspects of the media in ways that would otherwise escape the discourse of media history (2011:240).

He describes this machine analysis as a hands-on ‘kind of epistemological reverse engineering’ (Ernst 2013:55). By closely examining technical media as they work, Ernst draws the conclusion that materially speaking, ‘the cultural life of a media artefact is not the same as its operational life span,’ and that material persistence of their forms undo ‘historical distance simply by being present...even though their outside world has vanished’ (Ernst in Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:240). To illustrate this, he gives the example of a radio manufactured in 1930s Germany that is still operational today until analogue is completely replaced by digitised transmission of signals (Ernst in Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:240). From a media archaeological point of view, Ernst argues this provides an opportunity for reflection on the gap between these two otherwise separate times, and insight can be gained by examining the material processuality of obsolete media technologies (2013:57). In much the same way, it is my contention that film websites persist in their function after the films they promote have exhausted their screening options, and maybe examined likewise.

Originally Wolfgang Ernst trained as a classicist and historian, and so has a long-held interest in historical archives (Parikka, 2011:53). In the introduction to his book, *Digital Memory, and Archive*, Parikka writes that one of the conclusions Ernst draws is that history often overlooks media platforms, and how they condition what we know about the past and he is keen to distance himself from ‘cultural history’ (in Ernst, 2013:6; 2015:20). Clearly Ernst’s approach is informed by Foucault’s consideration of the archive (2013:69). But, as Ernst is writing at the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany in 1989, he is sensitive to the role of the archive in the East Germany’s Stasi which came to light at the time (Parikka, 2011:1). He proposes that archives function as ‘active agents in participating in “media events” in the way they store, process, and transmit signals and function as a necessary condition of knowledge,’ rather than just storage for the preservation of media content (Ernst in Parikka, 2013:15). In other words, by engaging with archives as machine technologies, rather than just as texts, Ernst asserts we can understand how media can be regarded as subjects that ‘author’ what they communicate in their own singular technical way (Ernst in Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:241)[[8]](#footnote-8). Ernst describes the expressions of machines as a form of writing which he terms ‘archaeography’ and attributes agency to them as a consequence (Ernst, 2015:22) . He concludes that ‘mining’ technical regimes of media may be insightful to understanding media history (Parikka, 2011:55).

To answer the first question in this book, regarding where film websites may be collected, recorded, and archived, the obvious place to embark on a search for historical film websites is through online archives, museums, and other sites concerned with the preservation of media history. So, Ernst’s deliberations on the digital archive will provide a guiding principle in this enquiry too. He makes the observation that in a predominantly digital culture, ‘the audio-visual and textual present is being archived as soon as it happens’(Ernst, 2015:22), and from Instagram images to tweets on Twitter, never has a culture been more dynamically ‘archival’ than the present epoch of digital media (Ibid.) As he explains, it is in the ‘machine’ that the past becomes archived, and so attention must be given to the archival ‘machines’ as well as to their contents (2013:7). Ernst concludes this is a way to neutralise the subjectivities of the historian as a storyteller, by-pass the exegesis of historiography and ‘let an objective pastness of the past reappear’ first-hand (Ernst 2013:45).

**The archive principle**

Friedrich Kittler cautions that all media ‘produce what it allegedly only reproduces’ (1999:145) which provides a timely reminder that media archives are not just concerned with the practicalities of selection, collection, preservation, conservation, and storage, but through these processes, philosophical questions of how historical knowledge is constituted need to be addressed. For Wolfgang Ernst, these considerations become increasingly urgent as culture artifacts and their archives are increasingly stored in digital form, and indeed, the consequent changes in the way culture remembers its past that are shifting from official institutions to everyday media environments as digital devices with their ready access to immense storage capacity enable archiving to become a quotidian activity (2013:16).

In *Digital Memory and Archive*, Wolfgang Ernst considers the implications for archives of the paradigmatic shift of the material form from analogue to digital, not least because it brings with it a heightened materialist awareness and sensitivity to his examination of digital archives (2013:57). Regarding online digital collections of the kind of interest to this book, he argues that digital archives can no longer simply be regarded as storage space for artefacts in the conventional understanding of the term (Ibid.). In fact, archives can no longer be understood as physical spaces at all but rather hypertext transfer protocols (http) addresses (2013:120). Consequently, Ernst suggests the technical operations of digital media reveal that the term, archive has become something of a misnomer, as digital archives are not so much, repositories, as ‘cybernetic systems’ (Ernst 2013:99). For Ernst, digital archives are better understood as systems of technological protocols, and, at best, ‘a latent archive,’ as any software-generated media objects are only manifest through algorithmic processing (Ernst 2013:82). That is to say, digital artefacts, like the film websites under consideration in this book are not ‘fixed data blocks’ and therefore what is archived is not the object, but the source code from which the object can be regenerated (Ibid.)

So, Ernst suggests that as archives evolve, the way we understand them must change too but in reality, there is a lag between the advent of a digitised culture and comprehension of what this constitutes in a technological sense. (2013:77). For him ‘time criticality’ is the defining feature of digital archives, in the sense of the decisiveness of a temporal event in the digital process (2011:58-9). Ernst argues that it is more precise to regard digital archives as ‘time-based media’ with their micro temporalities of processing and to acknowledge that things realised through these mechanisms cannot be archived in the conventional sense of the word (2013:99). Ernst is not alone in making this argument. Web historian, Richard Rogers is concerned about web archiving practise that privileges websites over other components because that is where ‘content’ resides in the conventional understanding of the term. Rather than other features of the web such as search engine results, advertising practices or embedded video, ‘linked to’ by other content providers which could tell the researcher much about the core artefact (Rogers, 2013:63). In short, Rogers argues the archived website, separated from its commercial support system, is an incomplete artefact (2013:64). Therefore, any analysis of artefacts like web sites will need to recognise its technological determinants are part of its nature.

**The digital memory principle**

In Parikka and Huhtamo’s anthology it is the essay by Wendy Hui Kyong Chun that generates the greatest alarm for the would-be internet researcher as she argues that digital memory is a contradiction in terms (2011). In ‘The Enduring Ephemeral, or The Future is a Memory’ Chun explains that the presumption underpinning digital media is that they are always ‘on,’ always ‘there’ and their primary task is to remember (in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:188). She describes how digital media’s unique selling proposition (USP) is memory, and how the promise of (digital) memory is implicit in the way digital media are conventionally sold to us, as can be seen in the generic names of everyday digital artefacts like the CD-ROM (Read Only Memory), RAM (Random Access Memory) and the ubiquitous USB external flash drive, popularly known as a ‘memory stick’ (Ibid.). The connotations of these kinds of generic product names clearly suggest that digital media can provide the longevity of memory. But Chun cautions that this is not the case and she is not alone in thinking this.

Grant Bollmer describes how ‘dreams of an everlasting cloud of digital documentation, accessible everywhere yet located nowhere in particular’ produce our everyday assumptions and ways of acting around and engaging with technology but agrees with Chun that these dreams are a myth (2015:66). Chun and Bollmer concur that the internet cannot function as a memory archive, because as Chun argues the bringing together of memory and storage that underpins digital media’s ‘archival promise’ is an illusion and the principle of digital memory is something of an oxymoron (2011:184; Bollmer, 2015:66). Bollmer points to a general lack of understanding about the relationship between data, software, processing hardware and storage media which, he argues, will be detrimental to the future of the archive and, by implication, the processes of archivisation (2015:69). He warns:

‘The inscriptions of communication media are the ghosts we leave behind. But with digital media, unless we account for the fragility of storage and the specificity of the digital, the ghost will perish as well’ (Bollmer, 2015:71)

The implications of what is being said here are significant for online archival research. In many ways, Chun argues, digital sources are no more permanent than their predecessor media and each media in their era were eventually found to be unstable: celluloid was highly flammable, and video tape stretched. Likewise digital sources degenerate when links break and sources are easily erased, and this has implications for digital archives (Chun in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:192). Critical to the archaeological perspective, then, is an understanding of the material nature of the digital. Chun demonstrates that digital archives are not storage facilities at all, in the conventional sense of the word, but should be understood for what they really are, which is cybernetic systems that recreate/regenerate artefacts each time they are called upon, Any impression of permanence, she says, is a misconception (Chun in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:197). Chun asserts that whilst the internet is in many ways about memory, it has no memory and she has characterised this seeming paradox in the phrase –‘the ‘’enduring ephemeral’ (In eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:197-8). Chun warns that archaeological expeditions cannot really deliver travel back in time. Like Ernst’s ‘reverse engineering’ of obsolete technologies, she suggests that encounters with the materiality of the archive raise issues about the preservation of the digital artefact, the conditions of its existence and, by implication, the ontology of digital memory (Ibid).

**The temporality principle**

The adoption of an archaeological approach by some media historians was prompted by a fundamental dissatisfaction with what Parikka refers to as the ‘myth of linear progress’ built into much historical account (Kittler, 1999; Manovich 2001:8; Ernst, 2013:15; Chun in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:191; Elsaesser, 2004:80). That is to say, a dissatisfaction with the teleological conception of history that regards the past as building blocks upon which the present is built and views the present as the epitome of progress (Parikka 2012:11). Thomas Elsaesser refers to:

‘film history’s tacit assumption of linear progress, either in the form of a chronological-organic model (e.g., childhood-maturity-decline and renewal), a chronological-teleological model (the move to “greater and greater realism”).’ (2004:80).

While Lev Manovich frames his conception of the past in quite different terms,

‘We no longer think of the history of cinema as a linear march toward a single possible language, or as a progression toward perfect verisimilitude. On the contrary, we have come to see its history as a succession of distinct and equally expressive languages’ (2001:8).

It is discernible that several of the authors in Parikka and Huhtamo’s anthology of media archaeological writings seem to be endeavouring to develop conceptual approaches to historical investigation that in one way or another review history from fresh temporal perspectives and ‘rewire time’(Hertz, 2010). In her keynote lecture, ‘Text, texture textile: a media archaeological mapping of fashion and film’ at the *Archaeology of Fashion Film* conference at Central St. Martins, University of the Arts, London in 2018, Wanda Strauven, herself one of the contributors to the anthology, suggested media archaeology may develop in three radical ways: as a ‘conceptual laboratory’; to ‘hack’ established media histories; and as a ‘*method to rethink temporality*’ (2018), my italics. It is this invitation to rethink temporalities of history which illustrates how media archaeology opens up the possibility of alternative approaches to understanding the development of online film promotion.

Both Friedrich Kittler and Wolfgang Ernst’s technicist approaches to media archaeology shift conceptions of temporality from what has been called ‘historical time to machine time’ (Parikka,2012:83). Ernst’s investigations of old and obsolete media technologies drew his attention to the micro temporalities of machine time which he calls ‘eigenzeit,’ literally translated from the German as ‘in their own time’ (2013:58). The ‘agency’ of the machine, he argues, prompts a fundamental rethinking of the temporalities of the archive (Ernst, 2013:45), as well as a revision of our ‘general cultural understanding of temporality’ (Ernst, 2013:15). Rather than regarding digital archives as permanent repository in which artefacts are held, he explains it was more accurate to say that digital archives are characterised by repetition as digital artefacts are generated and regenerated as required. Likewise, writing about something as quotidian as text messaging, Wendy Hui Kyong Chun points out how messages are experienced as synchronous communication taking place in the present (in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:200). But the fact that messages can be endlessly forwarded means the new circulates at the same time as the old (Ibid). Indeed, the very fact of the repetitive action of forwarding a message serves as evidence of its significance (Ibid.). As a consequence, Chun suggests that repetition provides a way to measure and scale in an otherwise unfathomably large communication network like the internet (Ibid.). In several of these media archaeological writings then, notions of cycles and temporal repetition seem to more accurately describe the temporality of media technologies than linearity, and cycles and repetitions certainly characterise ‘topos archaeology’ developed by Errki Huhtamo (2018).

**The topos principle**

Errki Huhtamo writes:

‘[Media archaeology] emphasises cyclical rather than chronological development and recurrence rather than unique invention. In doing so, it runs counter to the customary way of thinking about techno culture in terms of a constant progress proceeding from one technological breakthrough to another and making earlier machines and applications obsolete along the way’ (2011:67).

Huhtamo examines the passage of time by tracing the repetition of the topos which he defines as ‘stereotypical formula evoked repeatedly in different guises for varying purposes’ (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:28). The concept of the topos is not a new one (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:29). Topos study was developed during the 1930s by a German scholar, Ernst Robert Curtius although his writings were not widely known outside the country until two decades later, when his opus, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* was translated into Englishin 1953 (Ibid.). Curtius was the grandson of an archaeologist[[9]](#footnote-9), and his work and the commentary around it, in the introduction and forward written by Curtius himself, are infused with archaeological metaphor. Curtius was interested in locating tools to undertake comparative history (Burrow, 2013 in Curtius, E.R.1953: xvii). He was not so much interested in how a topos was disseminated but the fact that they can repeat themselves, recur and persist (Burrow, 2013:xix). In the foreword to his book, he draws parallels with contemporary archaeology’s use of aerial photography which enables one to quite literally see from a different perspective (Curtius, 2013, (1953):xxv). So, Curtius regards topoic survey as an empirical method of analysis which can ‘sift’ through European literature to reveal the continuities that may not be immediately apparent (Curtius, 2013, (1953): 15-16).

Curtius’s conception of the topos is derived from classical antiquity, where, with the emergence of democracy in the Greek city states around 460 BC, public speaking became an important communication skill for ordinary citizens as much as politicians. According to the Roman teacher Quintilian in his *Institutio Oratoria* (95ce), topoi are formulations of speech used in public speaking that are prized as effective ways of communicating ideas and as ‘*argumentorum sedes*’ meaning ‘storehouses of trains of thought’ (Ibid.). In the context of public oratory, the speaker was expected to memorise these topoic formulations of words and use them as ‘aids in argumentation’ (Gelley, 966:586). From the audience’s point of view, the oratorical topos provided a recognisable point of reference by which they could orientate themselves, much like the repetition of a chorus in the bardic form (Ibid). However, with the decline of oration in public life, the significance of topoi declined too, although it persists in education and literary cultures (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:29). In this way the concept of the topos is effectively downgraded as a form of communication to where it becomes regarded as a cliché (Ibid.).

The Greek noun *topos* meaning commonplace or formulaic theme bears some similarity to the word *trope*, a term derived from the Greek verb, *trepein* meaning ‘to turn to direct or to alter.’ Although today the terms have much in common, trope is more popularly used to refer to rhetorical or figurative devices, motifs, or clichés (Cuddon and Habib, 2014:741). Topoi also have some features in common with the concept of the *meme* proposed by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (2006), in that memes embody cultural knowledge that may be passed on to others. However, whilst the meme is the piece of cultural knowledge, a topoi is more like a metaphor or an allegory, which stands in for an idea the speaker wishes to convey but is not necessarily the idea itself. To illustrate how topoi emerge, Huhtamo cites the example of the phrase ‘I saw it with my own eyes,’ explaining that the verbal expression becomes a frequently used trope in correspondence home by travellers making grand tours around Europe in the 19th century (Huhtamo in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:30). Huhtamo argues that whilst these intrepid travellers no doubt visited the sights they wrote about in letters home, very often the way they described what they saw, aped the authoritative guidebooks they took with them and he argues these travel writing tropes evolve into a topoic system over time (Huhtamo in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:30).

For Huhtamo topoi make up ‘the building blocks of cultural traditions’ and they ‘manifest both continuities and transformations in the transmission of ideas’ (2013:16). He proposes that tracing a topoi may provide a means for making sense of media culture over time. In this regard, Parikka and others have made the observation that Huhtamo’s topoi approach is, in some ways, closer to media genealogy than media archaeology (2011:54; Huhtamo in Ganahl, 2016). Huhtamo explains that it is important to be mindful that when we are in the presence of a topos, we are not looking at a natural phenomenon, but a representation (1997). Clearly, Huhtamo’s conception is, in part, informed by Foucault as he uses Foucault’s term when he refers to topoic representations as ‘discursive meaning processors’ that express meanings, perspectives, beliefs and ways of understanding the world (Huhtamo in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:28). Furthermore, Huhtamo regards their generation, transmission, and their modification as historically contingent, and regards the topos as a context specific discursive phenomenon (Huhtamo in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:34). While Curtius confines his study to one form – literature, Huhtamo takes a more ecumenical approach to topoi study because, in his view topoi can migrate and manifest across different media contexts from 16th century travelogues to 19th century panoramas and spirographs designed to present moving pictures (Ibid.).

Huhtamo concludes that topoi may serve many functions: as connectors to other cultural spheres; as commentaries and elaborations of media cultural forms, themes, and fantasies; or even as formula deliberately used for ideological indoctrination (Ibid.). Moreover, recurrent topoi may point to broader cultural concerns and illuminate cultural patterns (Ibid.). For him, the ‘discursive artefact’ demonstrates how material things are transfigured into cultural phenomenon (Huhtamo, 2013:17). He describes topoi as ‘shells’ or ‘vessels derived from the memory banks of tradition’ with the implication that they are vehicles or carriers of certain meanings (Huhtamo in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:28). However, while this topos may at first glance seem to be just an innocuous commonplace and, as such, a cliché, Huhtamo warns that topoi can be mistaken for facts, and it is their banality that we should be alert to, as it renders them invisible and belies their significance (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:30).

For Huhtamo then, a topos is best understood as ‘a temporary manifestation of a persisting cultural tradition, linked by numerous threads with other cultural phenomena both from the past and from the cultural context within which the topos has made its appearance’ (Huhtamo in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:41). For Huhtamo, a media archaeological exploration of a topoi may demonstrate how the new is dressed up in formulas that may be years old, while the ‘old’ may provide ‘moulds’ or templates for so-called cultural innovations ( Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:25). In fact, Huhtamo often points to contemporary promotion as a site where topoi are common, as cultural intermediaries commandeer topoi for commercial and ideological ends (2016:2018), and understanding how topoi are co-opted by the media industries he argues, is a task for media archaeology (2011:41). Huhtamo asserts that topoic investigation is a way to ‘penetrate accepted narratives, uncover gaps, omissions, and silences’ in media studies - what he refers to as scholarly ‘lacunae’ (Ibid). For the purposes of this book , it is hoped that topos study may provide a way to draw attention to and analyse promotional paratexts which fall outside the conventional areas scrutinised in the discipline of film studies. However, he recognises that media archaeology has its blind spots and admits, ‘normally media archaeology can say little about actual experiences.’(Huhtamo,2018:37).

**The limitations of media archaeology**

So, while the strength of media archaeological scholarship lies in its consideration of discursivity and materiality, what is less forthcoming from these writings is any reflection of how media are experienced by their audiences. The diminution of the human dimension of media is discernible in the writings of the key figures whose work underpins the approach outlined so far in this chapter. Foucault’s work is critical of a form of history that makes ‘human consciousness the original subject of all historical development’ as he argues, it fails to grasp the underlying structures which constitute the discursive condition of their historical appearance (2002:13). In other words, Foucault’s concept of discourse is more concerned with the factors that shape experience rather than people’s experiences *per se*. This is clear in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* when Foucault describes his approach to understanding the past as the examination of the histories of droughts and irrigation, rather than experience of famines (2002:4). So, while Foucault’s writings are instrumental to developing an understanding of cultural formations in the general sense, for him individual encounters are of less interest. For Foucault, archaeology is always a consideration of the ‘plural’ rather than the particular experience (2002:174).

At the other end of the spectrum, but with much the same consequences, Friedrich Kittler’s writings tend to focus on media hardware, which he regards as the core component of media apparatus, while he too downplays the human dimension of media (Winthrop-Young, 2013:65). Describing Kittler’s approach to media history, Winthrop-Young writes, ‘Humans are at best the nodes and operators, necessary to keep the process going until the time arrives at which media are able to interact and evolve without any human go-between’(Ibid.). In effect then, Kittler’s approach to media analysis ‘effectively installs media as their own archaeologists and thereby removes the human subject.’ (Winthrop-Young, 2015: 146). This technicist tendency is discernible in Wolfgang Ernst’s writings about digital archives too. He argues for an approach to media history that is grounded in technically mediated materiality and computational processes which, he asserts, have been largely ignored by media studies in the past, which has often been preoccupied with meaning and culture (2013:7-8). In his work on media apparatus, Ernst concludes that it is at the level of mechanical operation that we need to understand media and non-human forms of machinic inscription (2013:9). In the light of this approach, Ernst reflects that machines may make ‘better media archaeologists of culture, better than any human’ (In eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:145).

Ernst advocates ‘ A ‘cold’ media archaeological way of looking at cultural artefacts’ (2015:18), arguing that ‘the media archaeological gaze…is a gaze made by the technical medium itself, like an optical scanner or an imager for deciphering QR codes is immanent to the machine and what he calls the ‘human element’ is not textually interpolated here. (Ernst in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:251). Describing the act of looking, the ‘gaze’ is a term that sits at the heart of contemporary media studies and at different times scholars have adopted the term to explain relations between those who look, and those who are looked at. For example, Foucault refers to a form of looking he describes as the ‘medical gaze’ in *The Birth of the Clinic*: *An Archaeology of Medical Perception* to explain the power dynamics of the relationship between the doctor and the patient (1963:9). While in *Discipline and Punish*: *The Birth of the Prison* (1975) Foucault gives an account of how the act of looking becomes inherent to the prison regime of surveillance via the panopticon (1995:202-3). But perhaps the best-known use of the term in film studies is by Laura Mulvey in her polemic essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in which she gives a feminist analysis of the gendered gaze to illustrate relations between men and women on and off screen (1975).

Since then, the term continues to be used to interrogate power relations in different contexts, but it is in the work of Ernst that we see the concept attributed to a non-human entity. Ernst observes that the human input to digital media is marginal as digital processes operate, ‘below the sensual thresholds of sight and sound - a level that is not directly even accessible to human senses because of its sheer electronic and calculating speed’ (Ernst, 2013:60). For example, the *Internet Archive*’s deployment of automated programs known as ‘web crawlers’ or ‘bots’ to copy web pages, that to date has amassed an archive collection numbering 824 billion web pages (Internet Archive, 2023). [[10]](#footnote-10) Ernst concludes by proposing ‘Let us employ media archaeology to suspend our subject-centred interpretations for a moment’ (Ernst in eds. Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011:253). By making this remark, Ernst confirms that the human experience of media is not central to his concerns, and arguably his approach requires a move away from the temporality accessible by human perception (Taffel, 2015:80).

In sum then, media archaeologists have been caricatured as ‘hard-ware, maniac assembler-devoted and anti-interface ascetics, fixed to a (military) history of media without regard to the present media culture’ (Lovink, 2003). And clearly whilst this criticism is overblown to make the point, media archaeology does seem to be less interested in the receiver-end of the communication process and is criticised as being ‘blind to both the content of media and *user practices*’ (Chun in Chun and Keenan, 2006:4). (my italics). For the purposes of this consideration of the development of film websites, and particularly in view of the social web, which has significantly reconfigured relations between media producers and media audiences, these limitations in the media archaeological approach become more conspicuous. In light of the ‘participatory model of culture,’ audiences are not just consumers of media but engage with, shape, and circulate media content in new ways (Jenkins, Ford and Green, 2013:2). Therefore, my concern is that to undertake a media archaeological investigation of the development of film websites that ignores audience engagement would be to overlook a fundamental element of this media production (Ibid.).

**2.2 A Cognitive Media Archaeology?**

With this in mind then, the question of whether media archaeology can uncover audiences’ past experiences needs to be addressed and whether it is possible to undertake a ‘cognitive’ media archaeology of past media experiences, that, as it were, reinstates human experience into the enquiry?

While most critical writing about film websites to date has focussed on aesthetics, design, and narration, Colin Harvey’s book on *Fantastic Transmedia* is distinctive because it considers transmedia from the audience perspective drawing on an early definition of transmedia as a form of intertextuality when he observes:

‘What intertextuality is describing is *a process of remembering*, and indeed the role of memory can be understood as central to transmedia storytelling, in which the invocation of ideas, characters, plots points or audio-visual imagery between elements of a franchise are central to that project’s success’ (Harvey, 2015:34). (My italics)

Harvey’s definition of transmedia places audiences and the operation of memory at the centre of the media experience and this seems to provide a promising way forward for a cognitive transmedia archaeology. Harvey suggests that memory may provide a means of understanding the network of relations at play in transmedia works and, by so doing, he postulates that the ‘emotional and cultural value’ of popular media forms may be more clearly understood (Garde-Hansen in Harvey, 2015:35). In other words, while promotional artefacts like film sites may not hold monetary value, their worth may reside in their capacity to generate audiences responses.

As a site for excavation today, the internet promises to provide rich terrain for the investigation of cognitive media archaeology because audiences can articulate their responses through social media (Mathieu et al., 2016:295). Posts, tweets, likes, comments, and shares on community forums, discussion boards and social media platforms constitute the material evidence of audience responses (Ibid.). Through their digital utterances audiences leave ‘traces’ of themselves that remain after the campaign is over (Ibid). For the purposes of this research, these traces constitute a tangible connection to a past experience that is fundamentally archaeological in nature. Indeed, it could be argued that they are the material remains of audience engagement and website discussion boards can be regarded as a kind of archive that can be scrutinised to gain insight into the subjectivities of their participants - a proposition we will return to and explore when the book considers audience experiences of the promotional campaign for *TRON: Legacy* (Kosinski, 2010) in Chapter 6.

**2.3 Turning Theoretical Principles into Practical Research Tools**

Following the deliberation on the media archaeological principles from which this book derives its methodological foundations in the first half of the chapter, the next challenge is to formulate a research strategy and these principles into research tools. As Parikka advises, media archaeology is first and foremost a practical, rather than just a theoretical, activity and that it should be undertaken, rather than narrated, and the experience scrutinised for what it can tell us (2010). In an interview Parikka did caution that practical strategies to undertake media archaeology cannot straightforwardly be derived from these writings and he advises these theoretical writings can only *afford* ways of undertaking new approaches to understanding media history (Hertz, 2010). So, the task of developing these principles into practical research tools becomes a local one, and to do this Jan Jonker and Barteld Jan Willem Pennink’s model of research has been adopted here to provide a guiding framework (2010:23). Originally this model was developed to provide scaffolding for the design and implementation of research into organisations in Management Science but the generic nature of this conceptual model enables it to be readily applied to the task of transforming theories into tools and techniques in other fields.

A picture containing text, businesscard

Description automatically generated

Figure 2. The Research Pyramid ©Jonker and Pennink, 2010.

In figure 2, Jonker and Pennink’s model outlines four tiers of activity to be undertaken in any research project (2010:25). At the apex of the pyramid, the research paradigm articulates the premise or object of interest and the conceptual framework through which it is understood, as well as the research questions it prompts (2010:26). In the case of this project, this is film promotion sites that were theorised through the critical lens of transmedia in the first chapter and this provoked a series of research questions outlined in the introduction. The second tier is the methodology that provides cues, or to use Parikka’s preferred term, affordances on how to approach the research, but stops short of providing specific instructions as to what exactly to do. In other words, the media archaeological principles outlined in this chapter provide the thesis with a map of conceptual principles, but not the directions on how to get there (Jonker and Pennink, 2010: 31). In sum then, the methodology ‘functions as a compass, a beacon, a set of principles and global instructions’ (Jonker and Pennink, 2010:33), but they cannot determine what should be done in a specific research context.

This requires the researcher to descend to the next tier which is concerned with methods and techniques. Here methodological principles inform the particular steps or phases needed to be undertaken to answer the research question. To pursue the cartographic metaphor, Jonker and Pennink draw an analogy between the method and a railway timetable with arrival and departure times for all the stations in the research process to describe the order in which stations (actions) will be visited (Ibid.). However the cartographic metaphor has its limitations and must be jettisoned at the end of this stage, as research methodologies have to be flexible and responsive to the situations they find, and so can rarely be as rigid as a train timetable needs to be.

It is at this stage that research techniques or tools must be devised to enable the research question to be answered. In other words, the research tools need concrete instructions for action, based on the methodological principles. These may take the form of either: ‘action’ techniques or ‘thinking’ techniques’ (Jonker and Pennink, 2010:34). ‘Action’ techniques set out to achieve a specific goal by means of what they do (Ibid.). While ‘thinking’ techniques determine how to think about a certain subject as well as gaining insight into the meaning of a subject (Jonker and Pennink,2010:34-5). It is often the case, of course, that action and thinking techniques are used in combination, determined by the criteria of the research question, norms of the discipline, context, and personal preferences of the researcher among others (Jonker and Pennink, 2009: 38). So, these research techniques become the tools that shape and guide the way data is generated, established, classified, and analysed to address the needs of the questions (Jonker and Pennink,2010: 38).

A last point to make about research techniques and tools is that while media archaeological writings provide the footings for this research, informing approaches to answering each of the research questions. It should be recognised as well that much of the analysis will be conducted on the computer screen, and visual and textual analysis techniques based on semiological principles conventionally derived from film, TV, and media, collectively known more commonly now as screen studies, provide a foundational tool for analysis in this book too. In this way film websites can be examined both as material objects as well as expressive artefacts of the cultural imaginary. And finally, it should be said that where there are no existing strategies available to answer the research questions, new strategies were devised, new tools developed, and new interdisciplinary approaches were devised to undertake the research. It is hoped these strategies, tools and approaches may be adopted, adapted and be of value to other researchers in the area, as well as having cross-disciplinary potential in other fields.

**Disciplinarity**

It is said that the nature of a research project is determined by the questions the project asks (Lattuca ,2001:118). In this book the research questions posed all pertain to online film promotion sites and what has been called ‘off-screen studies,’ a sub-domain of film/media studies (Gray, 2010:4). However, as I have suggested the methodological tools and techniques drawn upon to answer these questions extend well beyond these disciplinary fields. As Moti Nissani explains, sometimes ‘complex or practical problems can only be understood by pulling together insights and methodologies from a variety of disciplines’ and, as a result, the approach used in this research is best understood as, essentially, an interdisciplinary one (1997:209). As a field of enquiry, screen studies has always readily adopted whatever methodologies fit the task but remained untethered to any specific epistemological frameworks (Wythoff, 2015). So, in keeping with this, the case study analysis that follows in the coming chapters is informed by a concatenation of archival studies, cultural studies, film studies, games studies, literary studies, media archaeology, media studies, social psychology, and visual textual analysis.

Having identified this research as interdisciplinary, then, a further qualification is needed about the extent of the interdisciplinarity in this book. In *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity*, the editor, Julie Thompson Klein suggests there are degrees of subject interaction and a helpful the spectrum is mapped out by Elaine Simon and Judith Goode (1989:220-21). They propose there are four main degrees of interaction: from minimal interaction, which may entail little more than the supply of contextual or background information; to the highest degree of interaction where approaches are fully synthesised, to the extent that they fundamentally redefine each other because of their being brought together in the research (Ibid.). Over the course of this book, various kinds of interdisciplinarity are entered into at different points: from ‘theoretical interdisciplinarity’ whereby media archaeology is used to piece together the history of transmedia; to what can be understood as ‘methodological interdisciplinarity’ where social psychological qualitative analysis techniques are used to analyse audience social media experiences of the promotion campaign for *TRON: Legacy* (2010) (Klein,2010:24); What is of particular value to these interdisciplinary encounters is how, by doing so, fresh perspectives may emerge in each of the disciplines. Media archaeology is critiqued and the tendency to overlook/discount the human experience seems to be a gap in its approach. To address this, a cognitive approach to media archaeology is developed that offers up a new strategy within the field (Klein,2010:28).

To locate the chapters that follow within a disciplinary context, this chapter must now consider what is distinctive about the bringing together of transmedia scholarship discussed in chapter one with the media archaeological principles outlined in this chapter .

To begin with commonalities, clearly what transmedia and media archaeology have in common is that both are relatively new fields. Furthermore, both are concerned with the emergence of cultural phenomena, which is to say, the new configurations in the media landscape. But perhaps one fundamental difference is that transmedia have been largely concerned with the new, whilst media archaeology is interested in the practice of looking at media phenomena anew. Although neither field comes at this from an historically grounded or culturally situated position or tradition. This leads to the third area of commonality between the two fields which is that they are both essentially ‘gleaning’ disciplines that take a pragmatic rather that a purist approach to scholarship, drawing on the conceptual approaches they need, when they need them, rather than being determined by conventional discipline boundaries. In this spirit, rather than relying on existing approaches of film studies and fan studies to examine transmedia artefacts, I have used media archaeology to piece together an understanding of the development of this emerging phenomenon and its archival presence online. I would suggests that this has become necessary for two reasons: firstly, because as we move into a digital media landscape, the world under scrutiny is, indeed new with digital-born artefacts like film websites that have not existed in the analogue world in this form; while secondly, and relatedly, is the fact that in this digital environment, older disciplinary approaches may simply no longer be adequate. For example, film studies textual analysis approaches seem insufficient to account for transmedia artefacts like film web sites which are sometimes co-created with participating audiences. While similarly traditional archival studies may not adequately account for their digital counterparts online, without a clearer understanding of the material nature of the website.

This said, the relationship of this book to film studies is a complex one. What was established in the previous chapter was that this research contributes to the field of what Jonathan Gray calls ‘off-screen studies’ or, more exactly what Sarah Atkinson terms ‘extended cinema’ and is best described in these placeholder ways at the present time. But it could also be argued that off-screen studies and extended cinema are expanding what film studies is, and can be, in terms of disciplinary terrain. So, in this way the research contributes to film studies by extending and expanding what is traditionally regarded as the disciplinary field. The other way in which it relates to film studies is that the discipline is one of the conceptual underpinnings for transmedia studies in its recourse to the history of film, as well as textual analysis techniques. However, while film studies inform transmedia scholarship, it does not do so exclusively. Other disciplinary fields inform this transmedia research project too. For example, archival studies will be required to answer the research question in chapter 3 – where are film web sites collected, recorded, and archived? Likewise, to understand the way awards, honours and prizes shape the meaning of the transmedia artefacts under consideration, the project draws on scholarship from the field of cultural studies. And finally, it is important to recognise that because the nature of the film experience is changing, film studies itself is changing too. As a greater interest and recognition is given to the transmedial and the paratextual, the discipline of film studies will have to expand to incorporate off-screen studies or extended cinema. Consequently, this book’s interests will be incorporated within this larger understanding of film scholarship and the work sits within this domain of development.

**2.4 Developing a Transmedia Archaeological Methodology**

The final question related to disciplinarity this chapter must engage with is the question of whether there is such a thing as transmedia archaeology? On one level, clearly the term is already in use, so evidently the answer is yes. Described in chapter one, Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman’s book published in 2014 uses the term as its title and seeks to understand contemporary iterations by drawing parallels with early to mid-20th century instances of transmedia. By so doing, the authors establish continuities between the transmedia that is emerging now, and past times, rather than seeing what is happening in the present as a break with what went before. An approach which accords with Thomas Elsaesser’s ‘new film history’ perspective that recognises digital technologies have an impact on the way film history can be understood and is motivated by a desire to overcome the perceived rupture between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media (2004). Whilst at the same time, implicit within Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman’s conception of transmedia archaeology is a rejection of history’s tacit assumption of chronological, teleological linear trajectory that regards the present as the epitome of progress and all that preceded it as leading to this moment.

While the transmedia archaeological strategy I have developed in this book may share this designation, it is distinct from Scolari, Bertetti and Freeman’s approach in two ways. Firstly, it is concerned with the recent past – that is to say, the first decades of the internet when online cultures have evolved, and new artefacts are emerging and disappearing at such a pace that the transmedia archaeology proposed by Scolari et al. would not even be possible in the future. Secondly, my approach to media archaeology responds specifically to media archaeological writings. The transmedia archaeology developed over the next few chapters is closely informed by Foucauldian modes of thinking that see change as the consequence of the forces in operation. Although, it probably would be true to say that the collection of media archaeological writings discussed here have been written a decade further into the age of digitisation and are readier to attribute change to the digital turn. Through close examination of digital media, for example Chun declares that despite promises to the contrary, the internet has no memory, and this has implications for how a digital culture remembers. Whilst Ernst looks at how digitalisation has fundamentally changed the concept of the archive and how the digital turn in archival practice has created gaps and changes in the record.

The transmedia archaeology advanced in the chapters of this book examines how the digital past is different to what preceded it for these reasons. It explores how the emergence of digital-born artefacts like film promotion sites have been shaped by mistakes and failures, as well as successes, and how as archaeologists we can learn as much from what went wrong as from what went right. While writings like those by Errki Huhtamo on the topos bring to light surprising genealogies that provide fresh perspectives on media histories. So, taken together these writings afford new ways of thinking about transmedia artefacts like film promotion sites, as well as ways to historicise the new and to develop appropriate tools to scrutinise what is found.

**2.5 Conclusions**

Following Chapter 1’s consideration of the evolution of the concept of transmedia, the aim of this chapter was to lay the foundations for the book’s enquiry by: firstly, selecting and defining a group of epistemological principles which are pertinent to the research questions and yoking them together under the umbrella title of media archaeology; then secondly, by providing an account of these theoretical writings and the principles that emerge from them. The chapter then goes onto identify the way the principles inherent in these writings can be translated into methodological tools to ‘open up the past in new ways’ (Parikka, 2015a:13). For the sake of clarity, I gave an account of each set of theoretical writings separately first by author, in the form of a consideration of the contributions of both Foucault and Kittler whose work represents the spectrum of epistemological approaches to media archaeology, and then by theme, looking at the materiality of the form, digital archives, digital memory and temporality and the topoi. Then, in the absence of guidance from the media archaeology writings, in the last section I outline a proposition for a cognitive media archaeology. Having said this though, the aim of this book is not for these epistemological approaches to remain distinct and separate, but for them to be regarded as methodological threads informing each of the chapters which make up the warp and weft of this historical examination of online film promotion. By so doing, it is hoped that the facility to think transmedia archaeologically will become possible (eds. Huhtamo and Parikka 2011:2). So, this book can now move on to Chapter 3 to consider the first of the book’s key questions: where are film promotion sites collected, recorded, and archived online?

1. This phrase was adopted from the *Society for Historical Archaeology conference in* 2008 titled ‘The Archaeology of ten Minutes Ago: Material Histories of the Burgeoning Past and Vanishing Present’ that advocated that by historicising the present, consideration may be given to the question of what becomes remembered and what becomes forgotten (eds. Holtorf & Piccini, 2011:9-10). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ‘Archaeology-as-such’ was the name given to a panel of Archaeologists (in the traditional understanding of the term) to distinguish archaeologists from media archaeologists at the *Archaeologies of Film and Media* Conference held in Bradford, UK in September 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Archaeologists has disputed this definition of contemporary archaeology as a caricature implying that their interest is merely in the detritus of contemporary life, in contrast with the [evidently] more worthy task of media archaeologists to excavate archives whose contents have *apriori* been deemed worthy of preservation. The preferred definition proposed by Greg Bailey in his article, ‘Symmetrical Media Archaeology: Boundary and Context’ is that typically contemporary archaeologists engage with materials at the stage of ‘loss or abandonment at one (supposed) end of a cycle of production’ , which is where this book’s interest in extant film websites also begins (2015:44) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R.J. Wilson ‘Surveying New Sites: Landscapes and Archaeologies of the Internet’ *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 2.1.(2015) 1-147 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Andrew Reinhard (2015) ‘Excavating Atari: Where the Media was the Archaeology’ *Journal of Contemporary Archaeology* 2.1.(2015) 1-147 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As of 7th December 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This was a concern shared by the Science Fiction writer Bruce Sterling, at the beginning of the digital era. In his proposal for a ‘Dead Media’ project, Sterling called for a ‘deeper palaeontological perspective’ right in the midst of the digital revolution - on media history that would examine what Sterling referred to as our ‘Net heritage’ (1995). That said, it should be noted that Hertz and Parikka draw a distinction between ‘zombie’ media that still work even though the world in which they were operational has long gone; and ‘dead’ media described by Sterling which was likewise centred on forgotten media technologies but the difference being that they are long gone and no longer operational (Taffel, 2015:81).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In a paper about Wolfgang Ernst and his approach to media history, Parikka drew attention to the way that Ernst’s consideration of technology bore similarity to approaches developing in America (2011a:53) These included Software Studies and Platform Studies documented in Matthew Fuller’s edited collection, *Software Studies: \ a lexicon* (2008); Noah Wardrip-Fruin’s chapter in Huhtamo and Parikka’s edited collection of Media Archaeological writings titled ‘Digital Media Archaeology: Interpreting Computational Processes’ (2009); as well as Platform Studies such as *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System* by N. Montfort and I. Bogost (2011:54). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ernst Robert Curtius was the grandson of Ernst Curtius, the archaeologist who excavated Olympia [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Internet Archive* Tuesday 1 August 2023. Available at: https://archive.org/ [Accessed 1 August 2023] [↑](#footnote-ref-10)