



ART'CHIAE:

For a Media Ar(t)chaeology
of Telepresence

edited by
B. Grespi, M. De Rosa, M.T. Soldani, L. Lazzari



Milano University Press

ARTCHAE

For a Media Ar(t)chaeology of Telepresence

Edited by Barbara Grespi, Miriam De Rosa,
Maria Teresa Soldani, Lorenzo Lazzari



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Introduction*

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The final section of this volume is a multidirectional collection of dialogs and essays that aims to show the roots of the *ARTCHAE* project, as well as its linkage with other experiences and research projects between the past, present, and future of telecommunication media. The section is structured in three parts: the first (“Documents”) contains an interview and a lecture with response—first-hand documentation related to present and past artistic and curatorial experiences that are crucial for the project; the second (“Perspectives”) republishes a key essay and book excerpt; the third (“New Frontiers”) presents the inception of a new art-based research that grounds an innovative gendered perspective in the field of media archaeology.

The first contribution is an interview conducted by the *ARTCHAE* team with Italian journalist, art critic, and curator Maria Grazia Mattei. A key figure in the development and dissemination of telematic art, “new media art,” and digital culture in the 1980s and 1990s, Mattei is also founder and director of MEET | Digital Culture Center in Milan, where the *Le Radici del Nuovo* archive is located. In the interview, Mattei describes the preserved collection and its rationale, including valuable and unique documentation of the events organized by the curator in those decades. These materials, whose presence emerged with the cataloging and filing work conducted by Maria Teresa Soldani during the

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ARTCHAE project, have been relevant sources to study computer and electronic arts based on networks before the emergence of digital art.

The second contribution is a lecture by Chicago-born composer, performer, saxophonist, sound experimentalist, and mixed-media practitioner Matana Roberts, who addresses the topic of telepresence through sound and musical practices in the recording project *Coin Coin* (2011–). *ARTCHAE* has highlighted the critical role of sound technologies in media and telematic arts, and Roberts' work is exceptional in the contemporary music scene since it involves electronic tools and archival digging for creating multiple temporalities and connecting with invisibilized presences recalled in *Coin Coin*. The lecture is followed by a Q&A with Maurizio Corbella, music and sound studies scholar, and it reflects on concepts such as history, temporality, memory, and presence through the use of different sound and visual media.

The third contribution is the English translation of the essay “Closed Circuit Faces. Archeologie del volto in telepresenza” by Anna Caterina Dalmasso and Barbara Grespi (2022), published in the Italian journal *VCS – Visual Culture Studies*. This article represents the first inquiry into the lines of research later developed in the *ARTCHAE* project. It investigates videoconferencing platforms (e.g., Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Zoom) through the lens of media archaeology and positions them within the lineage of closed-circuit video art, drawing on works by early video artists such as Vito Acconci, Peter Campus, Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, and Elaine Shemilt. The text shows how, far from functioning as a digital mirror, the webcam apparatus—albeit concealed by its interface design—reactivates structural conditions already explored in 1970s video installations: the disjunction between mirror reflection and video feedback, the instability of self-recognition, and the splitting of face and gaze. It ultimately argues that the makeup table, as it has been represented in art history, can be found in the deep time of digital platforms.

The fourth contribution is an excerpt from Lori Emerson's volume *Other Networks: A Radical Technology Sourcebook* (Anthology Editions, 2025). The book represents the culmination of Emerson's ongoing research started in 2016 on so-called “other” networks—alternative and forgotten networks that preceded or existed outside the Internet and that can foster the imagination of more democratic and less corporative networks for the future. This research is also based on the activities and holdings of the Media Archaeology Lab (MAL), which Emerson founded in 2009 and still directs, now in the role of “Founding Director,” at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

The fifth and final contribution is an article derived from Wanda Strauven's keynote lecture, presented at the Milanese conference *ARTCHAE #1* on March 14, 2025, where she was invited as the first international keynote speaker. This essay signals the inception of a new research path and political perspective for the author, who in this article presents her next book project about scaffolding

as both an urban phenomenon and a multilayered screen that involves multiple presences and traces. Strauven, a key figure in media archeology, examines scaffolding as a material and conceptual framework charged with feminist implications to rethink the gendered separation between the domestic sphere as the inside and the public sphere as the outside. Both Emerson's and Strauven's essays are symptomatic of an original political sensibility in media archaeology that aims to situate the discipline, highlighting the operations carried out by marginalized people and interrogating the power dynamics inherent in the dominant media landscape, an approach that the *ARTCHAE* research shares as part of its theoretical framework.

Furthermore, the five contributions are all, in their own way, art-based investigations that become *archaeologies*: Mattei recounts her experience and interest in computer and telematic arts prefiguring networks and the cultural aspects of the transformation entailed in the shift from the electronic to the digital; Roberts speaks about their ongoing research for the mixed-media project *Coin Coin*, largely based on archival work aimed at digging forgotten histories that they rework through both traditional and electronic instrumentation; Dalmasso and Grespi propose and retrace an archaeology of contemporary forms of self-mediation in early video works; Emerson maps experimental uses of pre-Internet networks by artists and marginalized subjectivities, such as women, Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color; Strauven looks at works such as Maja Bajević's *Women at Work – Under Construction* (1999), showing how scaffolding becomes a form of feminist intervention to tackle the gendered binary between public and private spaces, where the latter is associated with femininity, protection, and invisibility.

By bringing together these perspectives, this final section connects voices that, in different ways, are essential interlocutors for the research path opened by the *ARTCHAE* project. Read together, these contributions trace a shift in media archaeology toward a more political, grounded, and situated practice, aimed at unsettling the field, including marginalized and art-based perspectives in order to recover lost technologies and confront how the dominant ones have been structured by power. Looking at marginalized identities and counter-histories allows us to read the present differently, and to imagine futures where connection and visibility can take other forms.