

BIOGRAPHY

(1468 words)

Erkki Huhtamo is a professor at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), Departments of Design Media Arts, and Film, Television, and Digital Media. He is an internationally renowned media archaeologist, cultural historian and exhibition curator. He is recognized as a specialist in the history and aesthetics of media arts and as one of the founders of an emerging approach to media studies known as media archaeology.

Huhtamo was born in Helsinki in 1958. He received his Ph.D. in cultural history from the University of Turku, Finland, where he focused on cultural history, world literature, and art history & theory (the last mentioned he studied with Sixten Ringbom at Abo Akademi). During his early career Huhtamo was active in various roles in Finland. He taught at several academic institutions, most importantly at the University of Art and Design (UIAH, now part of Aalto University) and the University of Lapland, where he worked as a professor in charge of developing a new program of media studies. He also functioned as a cultural and film critic writing for the national newspapers *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Kaleva*, and the film journals *Filmihullu* and *Lähikuva*.

Huhtamo was a film activist already in his high school days. In the 1980s, parallel with his university studies, he got involved in the experimental arts. He began working as an exhibition curator and as the programmer of the MUU Media Festival, the pioneering Finnish media art festival. He brought many internationally renowned artists to Finland, and is credited for furthering emerging trends like interactive computer art. He curated or co-curated a series of international digital art exhibitions for the OTSO Gallery, Espoo (since subsumed into EMMA, the Espoo Museum of Modern Art). He also organized exhibitions in other countries, including Toshio Iwai's first major exhibition outside Japan, shown in Espoo, Karlsruhe and Amsterdam in 1994-1995.

Other exhibitions include *The Vasulkas* (The Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, 1992), *The Interactive Garden* (OTSO, 1993), *Digital Mediations* (Alyce de Roulet Williamson Gallery, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena 1995), *Metamachines: Where is the Body?* (OTSO, 1996), *Unexpected Obstacles. The Work of Perry Hoberman 1982-1997* (OTSO, 1997), *Encoded Identities* (OTSO, 1998), *Excavated Sounds: Paul DeMarinis* (OTSO, 2000), *Resonant Messanges. Media Installations by Paul DeMarinis* (Alyce de Roulet Williamson Gallery, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, 2000-2001), and *Sufficient Latitude: Interactive Wood Machines by Bernie Lubell* (Alyce de Roulet Williamson Gallery, Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, 2008).

In 1994 Huhtamo worked as the visiting artistic director of *The Australian International Video Festival*, Sydney, June 3-5, 1994. Together with Machiko Kusahara, he curated one of the first ever exhibitions of video game -inspired art, *The Game/Art Interface*, for the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (1994). Huhtamo and Kusahara organized for ISEA 94 the "The Ride of Your Life," a special two-hour screening program featuring the history of the "ride film" from the earliest silent phantom ride films to the latest

theme park motion platform rides. Huhtamo later used the material to create *The Ride of Your Life* as a media-archaeological installation for a professional hydraulic flight simulator platform. The work was produced at the Image Media Institute of the Center for Art and Technology Karlsruhe (ZKM) and presented in the SurroGate1 exhibition, ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany, Autumn 1998.

Huhtamo co-curated the large *ISEA 94 Exhibition* for the 5th International Symposium of Electronic Arts (he was a member of the organizing committee). It was shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki in 1994. His curatorial career so far culminated with *Outoäly / Alien Intelligence*, a large media art exhibition for the newly opened KIASMA Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki (2000). Works were commissioned from media artists like Ken Feingold, David Rokeby, Ken Rinaldo and Perry Hoberman. The exhibition, which was part of the Helsinki European Cultural Capital program, was both a critical and popular success, attracting 84,167 visitors in three months. Huhtamo's *Phantasmagoria* was a large exhibition of his own collection of antique media archaeological artifacts, shown at the Museum of Cultures, Helsinki in 2000.

Parallel with these activities Huhtamo developed, directed or produced documentary television series for YLE, the Finnish National Television. The most notable ones, both of which he directed, were *The Empire of Monitors: Media Culture in Japan* (1994) and *The Archaeology of the Moving Image* (1996). The latter was accompanied by a book, where Huhtamo first presented his version of the formative developments of visual media culture from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. The book sprang from research interests he had begun exploring (parallel with others, like Siegfried Zielinski) around 1990. Such approaches have come to be known as media archaeology. Huhtamo first gave a programmatic keynote lecture about his "topos theoretical" media archaeological approach at the ISEA 94 symposium in Helsinki, 1994.

Although Huhtamo has written many studies about media arts and artists, since the 1990s media archaeology has become the main guiding line of his research. It excavates forgotten, neglected and/or suppressed media-cultural phenomena, helping us to penetrate beyond canonized "grand narratives." Dealing with both material and discursive realities, it treats culture as a layered construct. Media archaeology both corrects our ideas of the past and helps us understand contemporary realities. What seems unprecedented may prove to be just old ideas in a new package. Influenced by the classic work of Ernst Robert Curtius, Huhtamo applies the idea of "topos" (commonplace, motif, figure or 'mold' that 'travels' across time and cultures) to combat deterministic historical narratives. He has applied his approach to a wide variety of media-cultural phenomena like "peep media" (a notion he coined), the screen, interactivity, museum displays, the cyborg, video games, stereoscopy and virtual reality, mobile media, the mediatization of public spaces, and dioramas and panoramas.

To date the synthesis of Huhtamo's work is the large monograph *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles*, which was published by the MIT Press in 2013, after over a decade of work. Beside exploring the forgotten medium of the moving panorama, the book purports to explain how different media forms influence each other, giving rise to the phenomenon known as "media culture." The work also demonstrates how layers of reality from the material to the

discursive are interrelated. Huhtamo will broaden and deepen his explorations in new works. On the top of the list are a new monograph on the history of mechanical theaters and a volume tentatively titled “Media Archaeology as Topos Study.” Other works in progress deal with the “media apparatus,” analyzed by means of a number of historical case studies, and the archaeology of interactive media. Huhtamo’s first Italian and Japanese language single-authored works will be published in 2014 and 2015.

Educational activities have always been an important priority for Huhtamo. Having taught numerous academic courses in Finland and lectured in many countries around the world, in 1999 he was invited by the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) as a visiting professor. The invitation was extended, and soon he applied for a permanent professorship at UCLA’s Department of Design Media Arts. He joined its senate faculty in 2001. In 2014 he was also appointed as a professor at UCLA’s prestigious Department of Film, Television, and Digital Media. At UCLA his teaching has focused on topics like the archaeology of visual media, the history and aesthetics of media arts, and design culture. He has also taught cross-cultural communication at UCLA’s Honors’ Collegium and given numerous Fiat Lux freshmen courses.

Huhtamo experiments with teaching methods, using ideas gained by translating research into other modes of expression. Multimedia performances with both modern and antique media technology is an example. With the artists Golan Levin and Zachary Lieberman, he developed and performed *Musings on Hands: Media Archaeology Meets New Media Performance* at Waseda University’s Ono Memorial Hall in Tokyo, Japan (2005) and at the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria the following year. His most recent magic lantern show, *From Dole to the Pole, or Professor Huhtamo’s Daring Adventures*, featuring musicians and foley sound effect artists, was performed at Los Angeles’ Velaslavasay Panorama theater in 2012. The stage performance *Mareorama Resurrected* has thus far been presented in Los Angeles, Chicago and Pittsburgh (an edited version can be watched on the Internet). The lecture-performance *Panoramas in Motion: Reflections on Moving Image Spectacles Before Film* was presented at the 60th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, Germany, in 2014.

Last but not least, over the years Huhtamo has put together an extensive collection and archive of antique magic lanterns, peepshow boxes, animation devices and historical documents. He uses these items in both research and teaching. The book *Illusions in Motion* was mainly illustrated with a selection of them. Parts of the collection have been shown at UCLA’s libraries and at the UCLA Hammer Museum of Art.

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