“Listen, Scoundrels!”: A Case Study in AI-Augmented Archival Curation

Sean Carroll
De Montfort University
Gateway House, Leicester LE1 9BH
P2546407@dmu.ac.uk

1. Introduction

Recent Artificial Intelligence (AI) curation projects have predominantly focused on automation's potential to generate novel connections within art collections. Projects like “The Next Biennial Should Be Curated by a Machine” (Krysa & Impett, 2021) and the Helsinki Biennial 2023's AI-generated panoramas (Schaerf et al., 2024) exemplify this trend. My aim with “Listen, Scoundrels! Calls to Action from Early CAS” (Carroll, 2025) takes a different approach, positioning AI as a tool for augmenting rather than automating curatorial practice. This exhibition, focused on the Computer Arts Society's PAGE Bulletin Archive (Computer Arts Society, 2025), demonstrates how AI can support individual curators in deep archival engagement while maintaining human agency in the curatorial process.

Rather than using AI to generate new cultural narratives or automated connections, “Listen, Scoundrels!” employs AI tools to enhance the curator's ability to analyse existing knowledge embedded within the PAGE bulletins. This approach addresses concerns raised by projects like the Nasher Museum's “Act As If You Are a Curator” (Dickey, 2024) about the risks of marginalising curatorial expertise through over-automation.

2. Methodology

The development of 'Listen Scoundrels' employed a distinctive methodological approach combining AI tools with traditional curatorial practice. Through structured conversations with Claude Sonnet (Anthropic, 2025) pre-trained on the Dimension of Curating Framework (Rowson Love et al., 2021) , an AI language model, the exhibition's framework evolved to align with three key parameters: working with fixed archival objects (the PAGE bulletins), maintaining individual curatorial authority rather than democratic curation, and prioritising knowledge sharing over knowledge creation.

The curatorial process involved four distinct iterations of AI-generated audio summaries using Google NotebookLM (Google, 2023), each providing different perspectives on the PAGE archive's themes and narratives. These summaries were systematically analysed to identify both recurring patterns and significant outliers, with particular attention to how these insights could inform the exhibition's structure while maintaining curatorial control.

The integration of Retrieval Augmented Generation (RAG) (Lewis et al., 2021) technology with traditional curatorial practices significantly enhanced the efficiency and depth of archival research. By enabling rapid access to both content and its source materials within the PAGE archive, the RAG system facilitated swift cross-referencing and connection-building across the extensive corpus. This technological augmentation of the curatorial process made it possible to quickly synthesise narratives that spanned multiple documents, identifying thematic threads and historical connections that might have taken weeks to discover through traditional research methods. The system's ability to simultaneously retrieve primary content alongside its contextual sources proved particularly valuable in constructing well-evidenced curatorial narratives while maintaining scholarly rigour in source attribution.

3. Results and Discussion

"Listen, Scoundrels!" demonstrates three primary findings about alternative approaches to AI-assisted curation. First, the exhibition reveals how AI can support focused archival research without compromising curatorial authority. The iterative AI summaries of PAGE bulletins provided multiple entry points into the archive while allowing the curator to maintain control over thematic development and interpretation.

Second, the exhibition's development process shows how AI can enhance individual curatorial practice without requiring democratic or automated decision-making. By using AI as an analytical tool rather than a decision-maker, 'Listen Scoundrels' maintains clear curatorial vision while benefiting from AI's computational capabilities.

Finally, the exhibition's focus on sharing existing knowledge rather than generating new connections demonstrates an alternative to current trends in AI curation. This approach addresses concerns about AI's limitations in capturing nuanced, interpretive aspects of collections while still leveraging its analytical capabilities.

The aesthetic presentation of "Listen, Scoundrels!" demonstrates another innovative approach to human-AI collaboration in curation. Through an iterative dialogue with Claude Sonnet, a large language model, the exhibition's visual design emerged as a contemporary interpretation of PAGE's concrete poetry and cut-paste aesthetics. The process involved showing Claude historical examples of text-based artwork from PAGE, then collaboratively developing code in p5.js (Processing Foundation, 2025) to create dynamic, generative text arrangements that honoured these historical precedents while introducing new computational possibilities. Rather than simply mimicking historical styles, this curator-AI collaboration produced designs that bridged past and present, showcasing how AI can be a creative partner in exhibition design while remaining grounded in curatorial vision and historical reference points.

3.Conclusion

While "Listen, Scoundrels!" demonstrates promising approaches for AI-assisted curation that prioritise augmentation over automation, several areas warrant further investigation. The project's successful use of AI tools to analyse and interpret the PAGE bulletins suggests untapped potential for exhibition audience engagement. Just as the RAG methodology and AI-generated audio summaries helped surface multiple entry points into the archive for curatorial purposes, similar approaches could help exhibition visitors explore and interact with archival materials in personalised ways. The collaborative design process with Claude Sonnet, which produced generative interpretations of PAGE's concrete poetry, suggests intriguing possibilities for connecting historical content with contemporary computational presentation. This raises questions about how such AI-augmented design approaches might create more dynamic and responsive exhibition experiences while maintaining the critical historical dialogue established in "Listen! Scoundrels".

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3. Renerences

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