

IMAP Electronic Media Preservation Symposium

Saturday, September 29, 2007

Introduction: Dara Meyers-Kingsley, IMAP; Sarah Ziebell, NYU Libraries

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www.imappreserve.org

DARA MEYERS-KINGSLEY: Good morning. Welcome to the IMAP Electronic Media Preservation Symposium. I'm Dara Meyers-Kingsley. I'm the Executive Director of IMAP, Independent Media Arts Preservation. And it's my pleasure to welcome you to what is sure to be a really terrific day. I'm here to just briefly welcome you and thank you all for coming. As Joe Torre, the manager of the New York Yankees says, "The word team does not have an 'I' in it." That's what IMAP is all about. This organization is a network of individuals and organizations who come together to share knowledge. We come from very diverse backgrounds, fields of expertise, and institutions. IMAP is about linking the museum world, the archival world, the preservation world, librarians, artists—all of us have so much to share with each other. And this is why we need to do the work that we do. We share this preservation information in two ways: in remote Web-based communication, and even more importantly, by organizing events where people come together.

This has been a really important year for IMAP. With Electronic Arts Intermix, who is one of the cosponsors of today's symposium, we launched an award-winning preservation Web site that I'm sure you're going to hear more about later today. We've offered workshops to archivists, conservators, librarians, distributors, artists, and other caretakers of media collections this year. And in the coming year, we are inviting you to join us in our next endeavor, which is to conduct a survey of obsolete video playback equipment. IMAP's network is expansive and ever expanding, and we welcome you to join our constituency.

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This symposium could not have happened, of course, without the participation and contribution of so many people. I have to first thank AMIA, Laura Rooney, and the conference committee for hosting the symposium and working with us; to Kodak for donating this incredible theater. I have to thank my panel chairs, who created so much of the context and the content for today's program—Sarah Ziebell, Ann Butler, Glenn Wharton, and John Thomson. And we are so fortunate to have such a distinguished group of panelists who will be speaking. I thank also Jim Hubbard for curating, Video Data Bank and E.A.I. for cosponsoring, and the George Eastman House for hosting tonight's screening. You know, of course, without financial support, a symposium would not happen. So we thank the New York State Council on the Arts for its continued substantial support of IMAP. And I thank Karen Helmerson and Claude Meyer for giving us the funding that we needed. Thanks also to the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation that supported the symposium. And I also have to thank, coming in at the last minute, the Experimental TV Center for supporting the documentation of today's symposium.

Before I close, I have to thank the members of IMAP's board and advisory council, many of whom are at the AMIA conference, and some of whom are participants in today's symposium. Throughout the year, these professionals guide the work of IMAP, so often volunteering their time and expertise. And I thank them for all that they do for IMAP. One such board member, who's also a board member of AMIA, is Sarah Ziebell. It is Sarah's particular vision and leadership that brought the IMAP symposium to the AMIA.

SARAH ZIEBELL: Thank you, Dara. And let's not forget to thank Dara, who's absolutely tireless in organizing this symposium. I'm not going to hold us up long here, since I know we're eager to move into the sessions. I simply wanted to give you an overview of the structure of the Electronic Media Preservation Symposium and some highlights that you can expect throughout the day.

This symposium is focused on the collection, documentation, preservation, and exhibition of

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single-channel, installation, and computer-based art. It had the genesis in a Web publication launched by Electronic Arts Intermix and IMAP earlier this year, as Dara mentioned: the *Online Resource Guide for Exhibiting, Collecting, and Preserving Media Art*, which we learned just last week has been given an award by the Archivists Roundtable of Metropolitan New York for outstanding support of archives. It was our feeling that many of the concepts addressed in that resource guide also warranted live discussion, and we designed this symposium to advance the topics explored in the guide in a more dynamic fashion.

So our first panel, "The Documentation of Electronic Media Arts: Addressing Preservation Challenges," centers on documentation both as legacy record, generated at the time of production, exhibition, or reception and collected to aid in understanding a work; and as active record, created at the time of a work's accessioning or cataloging in a museum, library, or archive. Both are critical for the works' preservation, study, and representation. However, archivists and conservators often have differing aims in their documentation strategies. Archivist Ann Butler and conservator Carol Stringari will provide two perspectives on this matter. Further, one challenge of documenting dynamic or interactive works is that there exists very little terminology to accurately describe them to the level of complexity that they demand. And there are few tools to assist the archivist and conservator with this task. Some headway is being made here, however, through efforts like those undertaken by Franklin Furnace Archive and IMAP, about which we will soon hear more.

So documentation definitely provides an excellent structure for interpreting an electronic media work, no doubt. Nevertheless, it's critical whenever possible to consult with the artist directly when embarking upon a conservation effort, since ensuring the longevity of dynamic installation, multimedia, et cetera, works often demands aesthetic decisions, at a minimum, and even often more complex choices about the migration, emulation, or representation of the work. While the

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effective archivist or conservator is well equipped to supervise the conservation process, many of the determinations the process demands are best made in conjunction with a work's creator.

We're very fortunate today to have with us artists Jennifer McCoy and Francis Hwang, who will kick off the "Conserving New Media" session by presenting their work. They've been asked to select pieces that may stimulate discussion regarding potential conservation dilemmas. This conversation will begin after lunch, when conservator Glenn Wharton and archivist Ann Butler interview the artists in a panel setting about their work and its conservation implications, modeling the artist-interview process. And you in the audience will be encouraged to join this dialogue. Glenn Wharton will finish off the session by connecting specific issues related to maintaining for posterity the work of Hwang and McCoy with international trends in the area of museum-based electronic-media preservation.

And the work of documentation and conservation is all for nothing without access. And access is the centrepiece of our final panel of the day, as well as our evening screening. First, access explored through the experiences of four pioneering New York electronic-media production, exhibition, and distribution venues; and second, access directly to the archival recordings of New York-based artists.

So none of the organizations you'll hear about today—Electronic Arts Intermix, Experimental Television Center, the Everson Museum of Art, and Hallwalls—really started out as institutions per se. Rather, they grew organically out of passionate individual and group efforts to stimulate and grow a distinct independent media art culture in New York State. And in their efforts, they provided critical support to the individual artists working here at that time. It's no surprise that their effectiveness led to their evolution into institutions. So now all have been in existence for several

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decades. Where do they stand with their own preservation and access efforts? We'll be hearing later today.

And Jim Hubbard will be following this thread when he presents the evening screening at George Eastman House, which will give us a chance to explore further the breadth and depth of electronic media art, much of it rarely seen outside the institutions that hold it. In organizing this screening, Jim found that determining the conservation status of most of the pieces he considered including here was nearly impossible. And even when he managed to find out information about a piece's conservation, often he learned that sometimes only excerpts of a work had been preserved, and not the whole thing. Of course, after exploring the complexities of documenting and conserving electronic-media works through our sessions today, we may not end up so surprised at this problem.

Some of the works being screened tonight are very recently preserved. In fact, some just in time for the show. A hearty thanks goes to Jim for his tremendous efforts to organize and present the screening, and to those institutions and conservation professionals who participated by supplying these rarely seen pieces—and in particular, Video Data Bank and Electronic Arts Intermix. It's going to be an exciting evening. Some of the people who were involved in the preservation of these pieces will be present tonight and we should have some time for questions there.

And just one final note: some of the works being presented here today may be outside of the norm of what you find in a film archive, but these discussions are reflective of IMAP's broad base of constituents within the world of media arts. Also, in a digital environment, we can expect these works to become less outside the norm, to converge more with other holdings. And so even in a film archive, you may soon find yourselves collecting, cataloging, preserving, and presenting works that take the form more closely of what we're discussing here today.

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So I'd like to thank you again for coming, and Ann Butler is going to be introducing the first session. Thank you.

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