





REVIEWS

Rinehart Richard, Ippolito Jon (2014). *Re-collection. Art, New Media, and Social Memory*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 297 p.

The book consists of five sections: an introduction, analyses of technology, institutions, and law as factors of digital depredation, and a conclusion. The introduction describes the problems of preserving installations by the artists Eva Hesse and Sol Le Witt and confronts the challenge of preserving these modern materials with the preservation of digital art and other technology-based media in museums. In this way, the message of the book becomes obvious: to put a halt to the disappearance of culture due to obsolescence. The authors consider their book to be an investigation, and comment the text by field and margin notes. After describing the basic rescue techniques such as emulation and migration, the authors contrast the field of cultural practice and institutions with social memory understood as the long-term memory of civilisation in both a formal and informal sense. Formal social memory is canonical, so-called cultural heritage, and usually stewarded by memory institutions such as museums, archives, and libraries, while in contrast, informal social memory is a “moving target”. Social memory is influenced by new media in two ways: they change both the object and the means - and more and more cultural objects become digital or are born digital. Therefore the question of preservation becomes more and more urgent and is not a technical question but relevant for us all. The authors illustrate this urgency by using a case study as a lens to magnify the challenges of new media art and its preservation.

cence by examining examples of media art of the twentieth century. Case studies show the broad range of medium-engendered vulnerability of the art works, in some cases intended by the artists, in some cases inadvertent, which makes it difficult to preserve the original form of new media artefacts. In this context, metadata and records play an important role as they set the frame for memory and preservation. The authors emphasize the role of metadata standards and give examples of their use in conservation.

The section on the role of institutions outlines the challenges of storage and preservation of new media objects in museums and illustrates the current strategies such as migration, emulation, and reinterpretation and its limitations in case studies. The authors identify two threads running through the cases: the vulnerability of storage and the abstraction of institutions from the individuals who construct their memory; their crucial question is if museums, archives and libraries will be able to bring together institutional and public memory. The chapter on open museums describes the challenges and suggests some solutions.

The section on legal issues indicates that law in general and copyright law in particular play a central role in preservation. The case studies focus mainly on general legal aspects that might present obstacles in countries that do not underlie U. S. copyright legislation. The chapter on authenticity and integrity touches a weak point of digital cultural heritage, the transformation by preservation that influences acceptance or denial on the part of the audience.

In the conclusion, the authors admit that their variable media preservation approach invites

The section on technology reviews the evidence that technology is to blame for obsoles-



critique, debates, and questions. They try to outline a future research agenda and suggest twelve steps to future-proofing contemporary culture. In a final summary, the authors state that curators and archivists have to become futurists and reenactors in order to preserve digital cultural heritage because anticipation of the future becomes more important than codification of the past. This would mean a major change of the traditional idea of preservation.

Although the focus of the book is on new media art, it is of interest for anybody who deals with the preservation of non-traditional media in museums – which also include digital exhibitions. The book does not offer definite

solutions to the problem of obsolescence. Some suggestions of the authors, such as embracing the inherent variability of new media and turning it from preservation's deadliest enemy into its ally, or learning from indigenous cultures how to preserve living culture, seem too optimistic and enthusiastic. Nevertheless, the authors' discussion of the problem of degradation is thought provoking. The conversational tone including the informal and margin notes makes it easy to read. The sizeable section of notes provides a vast number of substantial resources for further investigation into this urgent subject.

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