THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Publish and Die

Citation for published version:
Biggs, S 2010, 'Publish and Die'. in Hartling & Suter (eds), Spiel: Archiving Electronic Literature. Peter Lang Publishing Group.

Link:
Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer

Document Version:
Publisher final version (usually the publisher pdf)

Published In:
Spiel: Archiving Electronic Literature

Publisher Rights Statement:
© Biggs, S. (2010). Publish and Die. In Hartling, & Suter (Eds.), Spiel: Archiving Electronic Literature. Peter Lang.

OPEN ACCESS

Simon Biggs (Edinburgh)

Publish and Die. The Preservation of digital literature within the UK.

This paper will describe an overview of the various activities in the UK that directly or indirectly engage with the archiving, curation, exhibition and distribution of digital literature and poetry.

Whilst UK publishers are requested to lodge a copy of the books they publish with the British Library there is no obligation upon any institution in the UK to collect, preserve or archive electronic or digital publications, literary or otherwise. However, there are a number of initiatives that, in various ways, address this, although none are committed to the specific area of digital literature or poetry. Nonetheless, due to the overlapping interests of these various UK initiatives, a reasonable proportion of work is, in principle, covered.

These initiatives operate in a number of different sectors, including the academic, public (e.g.: museums and libraries) and private. As there is no obligation upon any of them there is nothing to ensure a particular work is included in their operations other than by the efforts of the author and publisher(s) or by the specific actions of the collecting agency. Due to this coverage is patchy and incomplete.

Initiatives that will be discussed in this paper include those hosted by major institutions, such as Tate Modern, the University of the Arts London (BFVA), the British Film Institute, the University of Dundee (Rewind), De Montfort University (Transliteracies), Lancaster University (CaCHE) the Arts and Humanities Digital Services, Intute and the UK National Archives as well as those initiated by smaller bodies, such as Lux, Lo-Fi, Hyperliterature Exchange, Soundtoys and others.

How this situation impacts upon the UK creative practitioner working with digital media will be a particular focus of the paper.

Although there are a good number of artists and authors in the UK working with digital literature and its variations there is, at this time, no coherent or centralised initiative or programme designed to enable the conservation, study and presentation of digital or electronic literature. However, there are various activities that, together, represent a degree of engagement with the archiving, curation, analysis, exhibition and distribution of digital literature. These range from programmes undertaken by major

international institutions, such as the *British Library*, *Tate* and the *British Film Institute*, through to those initiated within academia (*the University of the Arts*, *Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design Dundee University*, *De Montfort University* and *Lancaster University*) to smaller and less well known projects by organisations such as *Lux*, *Lo-Fi*, *Soundtoys* and the *Hyperliterature Exchange*.

Current obligations on publishers and libraries

As is the case in many countries, publishers in the UK are under a legal obligation to lodge a copy of the publications they produce with the nation's main library through the *British Library*'s Deposit Office. This requirement is enshrined in the *Legal Deposit Libraries Act* of 2003. This generally means all publications that are issued an ISBN or ISSN will find their way to the *British Library*. However, as with many laws, absolute observation is not the case. Numerous publications fail to be lodged with the Library.

As yet there is no similar legal obligation for publishers of online or offline digital publications to lodge material with the Library. However, there are interim arrangements in place to address this emerging area of publication. UK websites, which might be selected by project members or be nominated by members of the public, are being archived by the *UK Web Archiving Consortium*, composed of the *British Library*, the *National Archives*, the *Joint Information Systems Committee*, the *National Libraries of Scotland and Wales* and the *Wellcome Library*. The archive of websites can be consulted at the *UK Web Archiving Consortium* (2000) website.

As yet this archive is very small, consisting of nine general subject areas which are subsequently divided into more narrowly defined areas of activity. As of March 2009 the database consisted of 4,878 unique website titles. Given the scale of the web, even within a single country such as the UK, this is an infinitesimally small proportion of what could be archived. To put this in context, in February 2007 108,810,358 unique websites were identified[1]. It would appear a Sisyphean task to even begin to archive all this material. To consider how the smallest fraction of this mountain of data could be evaluated to determine what might justifiably be archived is beyond imagining. Is this a task that public resources should be applied to? If it is, what criteria should be employed to establish what is and is not of value?

Perhaps in part to answer this question, at the request of the UK government, an independent *Legal Deposit Advisory Panel* has convened since September 2005 to begin to look at how electronic and digital material can be collected and preserved and the issues subsequent to that, within a larger brief to consider all aspects of the implementation of the 2003 Deposits act. Membership of the panel is composed of senior university and public librarians, mainstream publishers, specialists in media law, governmental policy advisers on communications and e-commerce and academics. This group of advisers represents a lot of experience in the areas of publishing, librarianship and the law. However, there are no members of the panel with expertise in the area of

---

[1] Data acquired from http://www.boutell.com/newfaq/misc/sizeofweb.html, accessed June 9, 2009.

digital authorship and specifically nobody representing the interests of authors, whether they work with conventional publishing formats or embrace electronic and digital media.

In January 2007 a voluntary scheme for the deposit of offline digital publications was re-launched after having been previously in place since 2000. The *Legal Deposit Advisory Panel* decided to re-launch this initiative as in its previous form it was proving ineffective and overly complex. The re-launch consisted of a streamlining of project objectives and the criteria and processes for selecting and lodging relevant material within the archive. A letter was sent to the various heads of the Publishing Trade Associations in order to publicise the programme and encourage its take-up. As part of this the Advisory Panel undertook to monitor the efficacy of the scheme. However, this process depends on publishers voluntarily and proactively entering data into the scheme's database. There is no publicly accessible data indicating the success of the scheme, nor data associated with any monitoring process.

A similar voluntary scheme to the offline digital publications archive has also been established for e-journals, although at this stage the purpose of the project has been to test the technical and human resource infrastructure such a project requires. To date some twenty-three publishers have been involved, with around two hundred e-journal titles being archived. No end-user access has been established for this project and as yet no public access to its content is possible.

To some extent paralleling and augmenting these initiatives are developments in the UK Research Councils guidelines for the preservation and dissemination of publicly funded research outcomes. Whilst this might not seem relevant to the area of creative arts authorship in electronic and digital media it is the case that since 1996 the UK Research Councils and Higher Education Funding Councils have recognised creative arts practice as research and have funded it. Due to this there is a growing body of creative arts work, including significant activity in the digital arts, to be found in the public domain that has been funded by the Research Councils. Policy positions and directives that are adopted by the Research Councils therefore have the potential to directly impact on how this work is produced, maintained and disseminated and many creative practitioners now have to take these issues into consideration.

Some of the UK's Research Councils are actively considering requiring higher education institutions to ensure that all publicly funded research they undertake is presented in the public domain through an institutional website. A number of universities have adopted this policy prior to the Councils issuing the requirement as a directive, suggesting that many university research managers assume that it is only a matter of time before this occurs. To date the main issue that has held this process up has been academic journal publishers raising concerns as to the impact such a policy would have on their business model. However, this debate has been gradually moving to resolution as various other models are developed and it is recognised that journals will continue to have a critically important role to play in the process of peer review, assuring their future survival. The likely outcome of this process will be a situation where a lot of Research Council funded creative practice outcomes will be required to be maintained in publicly accessible research archives, most likely at the institutional level. This would seem to suggest that we can look forward to a situation where significant levels of activity in digital literature will be institutionally archived. However, this does not in anyway

guarantee that the methods of archiving will be appropriate to the work nor always protect the intellectual rights of the authors. Indeed, this development may function to undermine the rights of the author in favour of their employing institution, raising serious concerns for artists and others who choose to pursue their work, whether in part or entirely, within the context of academia.

The authors

Although many professional artists and authors in the UK are employed in higher education, preparing the next generation of creative practitioners and undertaking research and creative practice within an institutional context, it remains the situation that most authors of digital literature operate within a self-publishing model, wherever and however they are otherwise employed. It is probable that many of these authors, if not most of them, have chosen to work with digital and networked media, at least in part, as they do not wish to have their work mediated through publishing industry or mainstream art world mechanisms. As has been seen across many art forms, whether the visual arts, cinema or music, artists have used networked technologies to circumvent the leviathan institutions that comprise established media forms and have sought a more direct engagement with their potential audiences. Whilst this may have once been the preferred route of the amateur or aspiring professional it is now the case that many established artists are pursuing this strategy of dissemination. This is particularly the case for authors of digital literature, whose work often depends upon the Internet for both its diffusion and technical functionality.

One outcome of such developments is that the management of publishing is being removed from mainstream publishers. The large and small publishing houses that comprise the traditional literature and poetry world arguably have little or no role in the domain of digital literature. Authors often maintain their own websites or lodge their work within collectively organised online resources (eg: *Rhizome* or the *Electronic Literature Organisation*). Such a model has seen a significant increase in the number of authors recognisably active in the field and in their audiences. However, as these artists and authors are not represented or managed by mainstream publishers their work is not likely to be covered in any coherent manner by the activities of the *Legal Deposit Advisory Panel* or the *UK Web Archiving Consortium*, which undertake much of their work in liaison with established industry players. Authors therefore depend on other, less centralised, initiatives to assure the preservation, study and wider distribution of their work, especially if they do not work within an academic context. These authors tend to depend on other agencies and institutions to maintain and present their work, both small and large.

Institutional initiatives

As a large international UK institution the *Tate* is best known for its non-chronological hanging of 20th Century modernist and post-modernist art, its regular Turbine Hall commissions and the annual *Turner prize*. However, it has also been quietly building a small but serious collection of artists work with digital media covering the past

fifty years, including works by some artists whose work is or could be regarded as part of digital literature. *Tate Modern*'s primary mission is the collection and conservation of art since 1900 and as part of that it has commissioned and/or acquired works by artists such as *Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries*, *Mark Amerika* and *Heath Bunting*. Whilst this body of digital literature could not be described as an extensive collection it nevertheless represents the acceptance of a small number of some of the key artists working with digital text by what is arguably the most important visual arts institution in the UK. Thus it can be expected that these artists' works will be canonized as amongst the 20th and 21st Centuries most significant work and appropriately conserved, studied and disseminated for future audiences.

Tate has a very active research department with much of its work dedicated to the conservation of modern art. Current projects include *Matters in Media Art*, a project designed to provide guidelines for the care of time-based artworks, including digital media. It is undertaking this work as part of an international consortium of partners including the *Museum of Modern Art*. Artists whose work is included in this programme include *Gary Hill*, well known for his video and text based installations, performances and video works, and *Eija-Liisa Ahtila*. Any time-based artworks that *Tate* holds in its collections might also be studied as part of this research.

Alongside this *Tate* is undertaking another research project titled *Inside Installations*, which is researching the preservation and presentation of installation art, including media based artworks incorporating textual elements. Similar to *Matters in Media Art*, a small number of artists' works are being employed as test cases, including that of *Bruce Nauman*. The research is a joint project with *Institute Collectie Amsterdam*, *Restaurierungszentrum der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf, S.M.A.K.*, Ghent, *Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia*, Madrid and *SBMK/Foundation for the Conservation of Modern Art*, Netherlands. None of this represents a sustained or coherent address to digital literature, however it does involve one of the few mainstream institutions in the UK collecting and preserving artworks that cross over into this area of practice. Whether this will be sustained and incorporate work from the domain of digital literature is an unknown, although *Tate* has no specific remit to work with text-based work. This lack of coverage will continue to be a problem so long as artists persist in working across and between disciplines and genres whilst institutions retain their discipline based focus.

Similar to the *Tate*, the *British Film Institute* (1998) has a remit to collect, preserve and study creative work undertaken in its domain of interest, film and the moving image. Again, like *Tate*, this does not include any specific responsibility to include digital literature. However, once again due to artists working across disciplines and to the crossover between moving image media and aspects of digital literature practice, a small number of works have fallen within the remit of the *BFI*'s activities. The *BFI* has a mature and well-developed research programme and an excellent web portal that allows access to many resources, both internal and external. One particularly useful resource is an extensive open access directory of research projects being undertaken in the UK into moving image and related practices. The work covered here ranges from that of individual PhD students through to major institutional research projects. A few of these have direct relevance to the area of digital literature, especially as it relates to digital and

media literacy's. The database is searchable using key words and can be data-mined for links to specific research projects. Aside from this, the *BFI* houses the UK's (and one of the world's) largest archives of moving image work covering the entire history of cinema, video and television.

On a much smaller scale than the *BFI*, but complementing its activities with a specific focus on video art and experimental film, are the activities of *Lux*. Formed from the merger of London Electronic (Video) Arts and the London Film-makers Cooperative, *Lux*'s mission has been to assist artists in the production and dissemination of their work and to manage the UK's main archive of international artists' work with the moving image. Amongst the numerous artists in the collection are many who have worked with text as a key focus in their practice within electronic and/or digital media, from *David Blair* and *Douglas Davis* to *Bill Seaman* and *Stanza*. *Lux* holds all these works in archival environmental conditions and in most cases the works are available for viewing at Lux or can be hired for personal use and public presentations. The *Lux* (2002) website has a full index of the works in its archive which is fully searchable and also has thematically organised sections, including one focused on language and text and another on literature. Complementing the main *Lux* website is *Luxonline*, an online resource where in depth information and documentary material on particular artists and specific works can be researched and referenced, including commissioned scholarly and critical essays on works in the collection.

More specialised but rigorous repositories of work related to that held by the *Lux* are also being created and maintained at the *University of the Arts London* (the *British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection* (2000) established by ex-Arts Council film and video officer *David Curtis* – and at the *Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art* at the *University of Dundee* (*Rewind* (2005), a project dedicated to conserving and studying early British video art, led by *Stephen Partridge*). Neither of these projects specifically address digital literature but a number of artists in their collections have been active in this area, as with the collections held by *Lux*. Whilst it is the case that much of the work that has attracted the most attention in the area of digital literature derives from practices in more conventional forms of literature and poetry it is also the case that many of the key artists active in the field have backgrounds in other areas, including performance art, digital arts and experimental moving image. Complementing that are the many writers who have chosen to work with electronic media, such as video and computers, and have found their work regarded not only as literature but as visual or media art. It is therefore not surprising that archives of artists' experimental moving image work should contain work relevant to digital literature studies.

The *Foundation for Art and Creative Technology* has, since 1992, been an instrumental UK organisation in the commissioning and exhibition of new media art. Based in Liverpool and housing state of the art cinemas and galleries, *FACT* has mounted some of the seminal exhibitions of media arts held in the UK, including the Videopositive series of festivals. In the process *FACT* has built up an extensive documentary resource of artists work with new media, including many authors of digital literature. Key artists, such as *JoDi*, have had major solo exhibitions at *FACT* whilst others have been commissioned to produce work for off-site contexts. As part of its mission *FACT* is making its archive of material publicly available on the web. This rich

archive includes work by artists working with literature and media arts, such as *Vuk Cosic* and the *Critical Art Ensemble*. This is a valuable resource for gaining contextualising information on often hard to find work, especially as it relates to exhibition and commissioning, but it is not a repository designed to preserve the actual works in question. However, *FACT* is researching how new media artworks might be preserved for future exhibition and as part of this is working with a select number of artists' projects studying how they can be preserved and, to some degree, future proofed.

Academic initiatives

In academia there are also initiatives that function to complement the work described here. The *Computer Arts, Contexts, Histories, Etc* (CACHe-) project (2002), initiated by *Paul Brown* and *Charlie Gere*, hosted by *Birkbeck University of London*, had a limited mission to study and preserve British computer art from the 1950's to the 1970's. Whilst it had no remit to address digital literature it is of interest as firstly it represents a possible model of a small decentralised strategy for the preservation of media based art forms and, secondarily, because some of the artists its concerned itself with were pioneers in the use of computational systems in text works. Much of *CACHe*'s focus was on the work undertaken by members or associates of the *British Computer Art Society*, founded by *John Lansdown*. An archive existed of much of this material but it was formed from numerous media, many redundant (such as punch-cards and large format floppy disks). Whilst it was recognised it was important to conserve this original material it was also understood that it was, or was becoming impossible, to reconstruct the actual artworks from the original data. Thus it was also a priority to preserve the artworks themselves. This raises interesting questions about where the primary trace of creative value is to be found in technologically mediated art. Is it in the data and algorithms with which works are produced or in the final outputs (prints, films, texts, etc)? Is the primary trace in the even more ephemeral and often poorly recorded creative practices and processes involved in the making of these hybrid sets of artefacts? If so, how best do we document, preserve and present this material?

The *CACHe* project has been successful in securing the future of important historical material but as the project website itself states, the main part of the work, the study and interpretation of the evidence, is yet to begin. Nevertheless, the *CACHe* website presents an online repository of previously rarely seen important pioneering work, amongst it works of direct relevance to the history of digital literature. Important artworks employing digital text have been made accessible, produced by pioneering artists and authors such as *Ken Knowlton*, *Lillian Schwartz*, *John Lansdown*, *Peter Struyken*, *Abraham Moles*, *Frieder Nake*, *George Nees*, *Manfred Mohr* and others. Whilst it is the case that many of these works employ text because the *IBM* Golf-ball printer was one of the few output devices available to artists wishing to produce computer generated images, at that time, the work nevertheless makes for an interesting comparative study in relation to the concrete poetry that was being produced by other authors at around the same time. It is also the case that some of the works explicitly evoke textual approaches to image making and seek to blur text, image and other media in ways that are relevant to contemporary practices in digital literature. The *CACHe* collection has now been

acquired by the *Victoria and Albert Museum*, London, along with related collections, forming the basis of what might become a leading international repository of early digital arts. A book documenting these collections and related works has also been published (Brown et.al. 2007).

The *Institute for Creative Technologies* at *De Montfort University* hosts *Sue Thomas'* research into Transliteracies (*Transliteracy Blog* 2006), a project she has undertaken in liaison with *Alan Liu*'s own *Transliteracies project* (2005) at the *University of California Santa Barbara*. This is an international project involving other notable researchers (*N. Katherine Hayles*, *George Legrady*, *Warren Sack*, *Mark Poster*, *Noah Wardrip-Fruin* and *Sharon Daniels* are all members of the research team) seeking to investigate how convergence media, such as that which underpins digital literatures, are impacting upon literacy. It inquires into what happens to our ability to read, write and interact as we acquire the capability to comprehend and mix signs, texts and meanings across diverse signifying systems and media. The *Transliteracies project*, both in the USA and the UK, does not attempt to collect or preserve creative work produced in this area. It is focused on generating critical discourse in the field. Nevertheless, as part of this process, it functions to taxonomise and tag activities, within the UK and elsewhere, in a manner that is extremely useful to anyone wishing to undertake research in this area. In the longer term it is likely that any activities intended to preserve creative work undertaken in the area of digital literature and transliterate practices will need to employ this resource as part of its investigation into what should be preserved, how and why.

Other than specific projects located within higher education institutions, the *Arts and Humanities Data Service* functioned as a national archiving and dissemination initiative funded by the *Arts and Humanities Research Council*, required to preserve the digital outcomes of academic research it funded. Its remit was to cover all the arts and humanities. Since 2008 the *AHRC*'s funding to the *AHDS* ceased, with individual institutions and researchers independently required to ensure any digital outcomes of their research are suitably archived and made available online for public access. The *AHDS* (1996) website remains online, although for how much longer is unknown. If it disappears it would be a pity for, although such a broadly defined collection of material makes it as a whole of limited value to subject specialists, there is within it niches of valuable material. Although there is no specialist section for digital literature there are a number of projects and sections of the archive that hold relevant resources, which are often more than simple listings. This includes rare audio recordings of live poetry performances (for example, recordings by *Caroline Bergvall*) and a significant repository of material about electro-acoustic music, including text-based work. This latter collection of material is maintained by *Leigh Landy* at *De Montfort University* as an ongoing project. Other sections include the *Digital Research Unit*'s (*Nottingham Trent University*) Sci-Art bio-robotics choreography website and the *Human Avatars project* of *Andrea Zapp* (*Manchester Metropolitan University*).

A more broadly based resource than the *AHDS* is that maintained by *Intute* (2006) which structures its database into sections for the Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Health Sciences. Within the Arts and Humanities section there is, surprisingly, no section on literature (contemporary or otherwise), although there are sections for visual and performing arts, film, music and cross-disciplinary arts that

include links to material of relevance to digital literature studies. The database is fully searchable and contains records of the work of authors working with digital literature, including artists such as *Maria Mencia*, *Jaap Blonk*, *Loss Glazier*, *Jim Andrews* and *Nick Montfort*. However, it is important to note that whilst *Intute* hosts significant taxonomical and indexical data records it is not an archive. It functions as a portal to existing online resources. If those resources are not maintained then *Intute* has no capacity to ensure they remain publicly available. As such *Intute* is not directly involved in the preservation of resources, although in delivering the service it does there is little doubt it enhances visibility of, and access to material and therefore indirectly contributes to its conservation and dissemination. Its taxonomical records are also a valuable contribution to the contextualisation of a diverse body of material.

Non-institutional initiatives

Outside academia there are some smaller initiatives that are undertaking work that contributes to the preservation and study of digital literature. Amongst these was the *Lo-Fi project*. This was an artist run project that commissioned curators to curate programmes of artworks produced specifically for the web medium. *Lo-Fi* would then integrate these resources into a unified interface and present the works within an appropriately contextualised manner. It did not seek to preserve the artworks but it did function to tag and disseminate works that otherwise may have had little visibility. Ironically, many of the artworks it promoted have outlived *Lo-Fi* itself. Today there is little trace of the initiative on the web. In this respect the project exemplifies the fragility of online resources and how this can compromise preservation and access to creative content on the web or elsewhere. The Internet is not itself an archive but a dynamic eco-system of elements, many of which have limited lifespans. We should not expect that having a web-presence will ensure existence in perpetuity.

The *Hyperliterature Exchange* is a UK based online project managed by *Edward Picot*. *Picot* states that the main function of the exchange is the sale of hyperliterature – electronic literature, cyberliterature, hypertext, new media literature, nonlinear literature, digital poetry and Flash poetry by self-published authors or brought out by small independent publishers and writers' cooperatives. The authors represented in its catalogue include numerous well known digital literature practitioners, such as *Mark Amerika*, *Michael Joyce*, *Deena Larsen*, *Tamara Lai*, *Judy Malloy*, *Judd Morrissey*, *Stuart Moulthrop*, *Norie Neumark*, *Kate Pullinger*, *Babel*, *Jim Rosenberg*, *Roberto Simanowski*, *Alan Sondheim*, *Stephanie Strickland*, *Eugene Thacker*, *Noah Wardrip-Fruin*, *Nick Montfort* and many others. All of these author's works are for sale and the website visitor is presented with a link to click through to complete a purchase. This link takes the user to other re-sellers of the content. US digital literature publisher Eastgate is a common destination of such click-throughs, evidencing that the Exchange is an index of works available for sale rather than a point of sale itself. It is of note that numerous links are defunct, generating '404 not found' errors, evidencing again the dynamism of the web and the short lifespan of some websites and online initiatives.

Founded by digital artist *Stanza*, *Soundtoys* (1998) describes itself as "the internets leading space for the exhibition of exciting new works of audio visual artists". Artists

known for their work in digital literature, such as *Stanza*, *Annie Abrahams*, *Jörg Piringer*, *Heath Bunting*, *Tamara Lai* and *Jason Nelson*, are featured on the website. One thing that is of note is that there was a peak of activity on the *Soundtoys* site between 2002 and 2007, although there is work presented in each year going back to 2000. However, in 2008 there is very little work presented and no new projects evident in 2009. Does this mean the project is coming to the end of its natural life, once again raising questions about continuity of activity online? *Stanza*'s profile as an artist has, in recent years, gained significantly and it might be that as he becomes busier producing and presenting his own work at events around the world the *Soundtoys* site withers as little new content is added. Whilst it is good to see an artist such as *Stanza* doing well one hopes that this will not compromise *Soundtoys*' activities, as the quality of work presented on the site is of a generally high level. It should also be noted that most of the presented work is hosted on the site itself, rather than linked to, and therefore it seems safe to assume that *Soundtoys* is maintaining the works they host on their servers. In this the initiative is unusual as many sites like this, even far larger ones such as *Rhizome* in New York, prefer to link to artist's own sites, relieving themselves of the need to service and maintain the infrastructure required to ensure works remain functioning online.

Conclusion

In this respect *Soundtoys*, whilst modest in ambition and limited in scope, probably represents, in the UK, the most successful model of an online resource for hosting artists' work that crosses over into the area of digital literature. However, it remains the case that whilst there are many artists and authors active in this area in the UK if you wish to access their work then you generally have to visit their personal websites. This means that the responsibility for the maintenance and dissemination of such artworks remains with the authors themselves. The question thus arises as to when, or if, a concerted effort will, or should be made to preserve this work? Some important examples of work have already disappeared from the web and may now be irrecoverable. As platforms, operating systems, browsers and standards rapidly evolve it is likely that more and more artists' work will become inaccessible unless the authors involved personally undertake to maintain an upgrade path for their work. This is a labour intensive and technically demanding process. We cannot expect the artists to sustain this activity indefinitely. It is also the case that artists get older and are, ultimately, mortal. Who will maintain the work of deceased artists in the public domain? Digital Literature rarely exists as a physical artefact that can be filed in a library or archived somewhere. It is a living thing that depends on a constantly changing infrastructure to function and be accessed. Key to many works in this field is that they remain live and online. When archived offline many digital literature artworks cease to function, as they employ protocols and resources only accessible when the work is online. Such archived works are rendered effectively dead.

Perhaps we should accept that, like many of the best things in life, such instances of digital literature are intended to be fleeting experiences and we should not seek to preserve them. The Internet, in particular, is a dynamic ecology of elements, constantly changing what it contains, its shape, how things are connected and its scale. The rhizomic character of the Internet also contributes to its kaleidoscopic character, as the 'web-

surfer' navigates its dataspace through hyperlinks, wormholes and Deleuzian folds. Strangely, the web can look simultaneously very similar and yet profundly different, depending on the point within it you choose to view it from. By preserving works of digital literature, which exist in large part as a function of this dynamic data-architecture, and seeking to effectively fix them in time and space, like an insect in amber, we risk alienating the work from its context and rendering it senseless. Perhaps the ephemerality of such work must be confirmed and we should not seek to collect and conserve it, allowing it instead to survive or die as the ecology it lives within constantly evolves. Nevertheless, where the preservation of a work does not compromise its living status it seems a tragic loss to allow it to die from a simple lack of care.

Reference

Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS), <http://www.ahds.ac.uk> [active since] 1996, (18.06.2009).

British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, <http://www.studycollection.co.uk/> [active since] 2000, (18.06.2009).

British Film Institute (BFI), <http://www.bfi.org.uk> [active since] 1998, (18.06.2009).

Brown, Paul, Mason, Catherine and Nicholas Lambert (eds). 2007. White Heat and Cold Logic: Early British Computer Art. MIT Press: Boston.

Computer Arts, Contexts, Histories, Etc. (CACHe), <http://www.e-x-p.org/cache/index.HTM> [active since] 2002, (18.06.2009).

Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT), <http://archive.fact.co.uk/> [active since] 1992, (18.06.2009).

Hyperliterature Exchange, <http://hyperex.co.uk/index.php> [active since] 2003, (18.06.2009).

Intute, <http://www.intute.ac.uk> [active since] 2006, (18.06.2009).

Lux, <http://www.lux.org.uk> [active since] 2002, (18.06.2009).

Rewind. Artists' Videos in the 70s and 80s, <http://www.rewind.ac.uk> [active since] 2005, (18.06.2009).

Soundtoys [by Stanza], <http://www.soundtoys.net/> [active since] 1998, (18.06.2009).

Transliteracies Project. Research in the Technological, Social, and Cultural Practices of Online Reading [by Alan Liu], <http://transliteracies.english.ucsb.edu/post/research-project/project-members/alan-liu> [active since] 2005, (18.06.2009).

Transliteracy Research Blog [by Sue Thomas], <http://www.hum.dmu.ac.uk/blogs/part/> [active since] 2006, (18.06.2009).

UK Web Archiving Consortium, <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/> [active since] 2000, (18.06.2009).

Simon Biggs
Edinburgh College of Art
Lauriston Place
Edinburgh EH3 9DF
Scotland, United Kingdom
s.biggs@eca.ac.uk