

Documenting Art, Science and Technology : The Daniel Langlois Foundation approach

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| Title | Documenting Art, Science and Technology |
| Subtitle | The Daniel Langlois Foundation approach |
| Lead-in / Abstract | <p>The Daniel Langlois Foundation's Centre for Research and Documentation (CR+D)'s collections and tools constitute a major resource for researchers, students, scholars and of course, the "historians of the new", who need an access to documentation that is rapidly growing old and that have suffered from a lack of care and concern. Indeed, in the last forty years or so, the development of artistic and cultural activities using or related to science and technology occurred mainly outside the so called mainstream art world. Because of this, a large amount of these activities have not been well documented and even when it has, this documentation has not been well preserved or has not been made accessible to the public.</p> <p>Documenting new media art remains problematic, even in our days. Two factors are responsible for this situation. First, the fact that many new media art practices are extremely ephemeral and unstable. The second factor is more subtle: it is linked to the fact that many individuals and organizations are doing self archiving. The activity itself is far from being a bad thing, but too many people believe that the mere fact of keeping everything and putting it on a Web site will be enough to ensure its survival.</p> <p>It is with that situation in mind that we started developing the CR+D five years ago. We conceived the center so that it not only documents the present day new media art scene but also we wanted it to put this field in a historical perspective and contextualization.</p> <p>We believe that the CR+D's resources are quite unique. While there is some excellent online and/or physical resources dealing with new media documentation and history, they are often limited to a very narrow domain or medium. Other are just not accessible for the public, or poorly organized or indexed. The fact that we have a long term preservation mandate and a high level of sustainability is also quite unique.</p> |
| Participants and speakers | Depocas, Alain (CA) |
| Short biography of participants | <p>Alain Depocas Head of the Centre for Research and Documentation (CR+D) of The Daniel Langlois Foundation since September 1999, Alain Depocas has been named Director of the CR+D in March 2003. In this capacity, he is in charge of a documentary collection covering the history, works and practices associated with the media, electronic and digital arts. He has also set up a database for managing the collection and information on CR+D's areas of interest.</p> |
| Full text | <p>The Daniel Langlois Foundation's Centre for Research and Documentation (CR+D)'s collections and tools constitute a major resource for researchers, students, scholars and of course, the "historians of the new", who need an access to documentation that is rapidly growing old and that have suffered from a lack of care and concern.</p> |

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CR+D'S ARCHIVAL FONDS AND DOCUMENTATION COLLECTIONS

Soon in the development of the CR+D, we decided to never neglect the importance of the "physical" documents. Even if more and more documents are digital, and even if more and more older documentation is being digitized, the physical documentation remains an extremely important resource. Of course we already started digitizing many older documents but for us, digitization is a tool for dissemination more than preservation.

A large part of our collection is made of usual types of documentation such as catalogues, books, periodicals, invitations, programs and other types of paper documents like manuscripts and technical drawings. Of course the collection also includes videos, CD-ROMs and, more and more, digital documentation from various sources. Amongst the main CR+D's collections and archives are the following:

The Steina and Woody Vasulka fonds.

Electronic and digital art pioneers, Woody and Steina Vasulka have played a vital role in developing a formal vocabulary specific to electronic and digital images. The fonds contains documents pertaining to their technical research and to the development of the works they created. Furthermore, the fonds includes documents relating to video artists, instrument designers and other collaborators together with exhibition catalogues and theoretical essays on video and electronic art.

Collection of Documents Published by Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.).

This collection features over 500 documents that explore the activities of Experiments in Art and Technology (E.A.T.) from 1965 to 1981.

The *Images du futur* Collection.

This collection, which runs from the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties, brings together international documentation corresponding to the 10-year history of the *Images du futur* event organized, from 1985 to 1996 in Montréal.

The *9 Evenings of Theater and Engineering* fonds

9 Evenings was organized by Billy Klüver and Robert Rauschenberg in New York in 1966. It was an interdisciplinary project blending avant-garde theatre, dance, performance, music, and new technologies.

These archives include in particular 35 and 16 mm films, sound recordings, videotapes, photographs, manuscripts, correspondence, technical drawings, and various artefacts used as performance props.

DESCRIPTION OF THE CR+D'S RESSOURCES AND TOOLS

CR+D's Database

At the centre of the CR+D's resources is the CR+D's Database which link many levels of information through indexation. Far from being only a library catalogue, the database is composed of specialized modules design to manage information about seven main types of information:

- Documents (books, catalogues, CD-ROM, articles in periodicals, texts in catalogues, Web sites, etc.)
- Individuals (artists, critics, theoreticians, curators, etc.)
- Organizations (museums, galleries, cultural organizations, research centre, publishers, etc.)
- Events (exhibitions, festivals, performances, conferences)
- Artworks
- Instruments / Machines / Softwares
- Terminology: for indexing, keywords, mediums, categories, etc.

The researchers are able to perform queries in all of these modules from the Web site. It is possible to obtain many types of result through cross indexation like a list of events in which an artist has participated or in which an artwork has been showed, a list of documents about an event or about an individual, a list of documents about a topic, etc. To achieve this, we have to index and describe documents at a very high or precise level. Even archives material is often processed at the item level, instead of only the series level.

Web site

The Daniel Langlois foundation's Web site provides a lot of high quality information about all funded projects. It also gives access to the CR+D's database through a very powerful search engine. Digital dissemination of archival documents is also part of the goal of the Web site. Every text, image and audio-visual document is presented with the relevant metadata and many search options are offered at the presentation layer.

For example, for the Vasulka Archives many types of resource are offered:

- An illustrated timeline (*The Instrumental Video*)
- A finding aid that follow standard rules of archival description
- A list of content (items) for series and files

Another good example of dissemination of historically important documentation is the famous *Radical Software* magazine from the early 70's. Through a partnership with the editor of Radical Software, the Daniel Langlois foundation uses the CR+D's database to index the complete collection of articles (more than six hundreds) giving the possibility for researcher to query the magazine's content and to access it online. (<http://www.radicalsoftware.org>)

Research and preservation issues

The preservation issue is without a doubt a very complex one. We are involved in a partnership with the Guggenheim Museum called the Variable media Network. Without going to far in the description of the concept and the partnership goals, let us say that it is dealing with the description of non-traditional artworks using its behaviours instead of its physical component. This description, obtained from the creator of the work, will certainly be of extreme importance when it will be time to take action to preserve it. Amongst other, the strategy of emulation is proposed and recently an emulation test case has been conducted on Grahame Weinbren and Roberta Friedman's *The Erl King*, a 1982-85 interactive video installation. (<http://www.variablemedia.net>)

Grants for Researcher in residence

The goal of this program is to invite researchers to use our documentation collection for research on specific topics. In this context Mona Jimenez, who is teaching film,

video and new media preservation at New York University, came to Montreal to work on the development of a documentation structure for instruments and machines used and developed by artists. The Vasulka archives contains many documents on such instruments like Dan Sandin's Image Processor and the Rutt/Etra Scan processor.

Conclusion

We hope having demonstrate that the CR+D's activities and resources not only are worth being discovered and used by any researcher interested in the new media arts and their historical context, but also offers a fertile ground for discussions around topics such as preservation, dissemination and contextualization.

Related internet addresses

<http://www.fondation-langlois.org/e/collection/vasulka/archives/index.html>

<http://www.fondation-langlois.org/e/CRD/index.html>

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