InterPARES 2 Project
International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

Case Study Proposal
Electronic Café International:
Aging Records from Technology-based Artistic Activities
Focus 1 - Arts

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Description

The Electronic Cafe Intentional (ECI) is a multimedia international network for showcasing creative, multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary, collaborative telecommunications. As one of the pioneers in artistic and community-based explorations of multimedia and telecollaborative cyberspace, ECI has created a networked lab that supports collaboration and co-creation between people in different cultures, exploring multimedia telecommunications, cultural diversity, and the arts in a truly hybrid-networked environment. ECI principals Sherrie Rabinowitz and Kit Galloway have won numerous artistic awards, and their telecommunications experiments have involved several museums as telepresence sites (including the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art and the San Jose Museum of Art).

The first to build an international network dedicated to the creation of telecollaborative arts, ECI has accumulated a large and historically important collection of assets throughout the years. The collection of electronically stored documentation represents a large part of the history and story of how artists migrated to cyberspace (beginning decades before WWW, and continuing on into the present).

After nearly three decades of aesthetic inquiry, research and development, and the production of hundreds of telecollaborative arts projects, ECI now holds thousands of hours of video and digitally stored documentation, including many of the domestically and internationally recognized "classics" intrinsic to the telecollaboration genre. Their collections hold more than 3,000 hours of video, optical disks, audio recordings, computer back-up media, additional electromagnetic storage media, equipment, text, drawings, paper documents, photos and other types of images -- documenting hundreds of artists engaged in telecollaborative works.

The collection is of significant historical importance. Activities documented include the earliest multi-site artistic collaborative works (something that Internet 2 is currently exploring in depth without knowledge of similar ECI activities 30 years earlier) and mid-1980s efforts using art and

technology to break down cultural barriers between ethnic communities in the Los Angeles are (long before the Rodney King riots).

Collaborators on various projects include many who have since become famous within other disciplines (such as Rachel Rosenthal, Laurie Anderson, etc.).

Rationale

This case study deals with a wide variety of media types that now pose the problems of aging and obsolescent formats. The activities took place from the mid 1970s to the present, and incorporated experiences that were dynamic and interactive, which is the focus of InterPARES 2 research. This study is unique because InterPARES has thus far focused on records of contemporary activities. This study highlights the problems posed by interactive, experiential, and dynamic records many years after they were initially created. Digital repositories are currently being set up independent of knowledge of the needs of aging records, and tend to be based upon thinking of problems beforehand. The ECI material will allow repository design using a more bottom-up than a top-down approach, with design based upon real problems that have shown up in similar aging records. We expect that this activity will foreground issues that need to be dealt with in record systems at the point of creation (now and in the future).

We will address the following types of questions:

Domain 1: We will address questions and concerns surrounding records creation and maintenance of ECI's multimedia records:
- How are the electronic records generated? For what purposes are the records created? What form do these records take?
- What are the processes from which the records emerge?
- What are the key elements, attributes, and digital components of the records?
- How does the creator use the records?

Domain 3: The following questions will be explored in connection with the age of the collection and the long-term issues of preserving ECI's multimedia records:
- How does ECI maintain its records through technological change?
- What preservation paradigms are required to support the long-term preservation of ECI's records?
- What are the documentary and technological processes or procedures that ECI follows to identify, retrieve, and access the records?
- What descriptive metadata are currently being used by ECI and how has it been implemented?

Policy Cross-Domain: In examining a multimedia collection more than 25 years old, and knowing that this collection exemplifies issues facing collections in the future, policy-related questions must be explored to determine the role of policy with respect to practices and standards.
- To what extend do policies, procedures, and standards currently control the preservation and use of ECI's records?
- Do these policies, procedures, and standards need to be modified or augmented?

- What legal, moral, or ethical obligations exist regarding the preservation and use of ECI's records?

Methodology

We will conduct an in depth interview with the Electronic Café artists who conceptualized and implemented this wide variety of works. We will administer a taped interview, focusing in on questions within the framework of the IP2 research questions referred to above. We will conduct content analysis on the transcriptions once the interviews are transcribed. We will identify key concepts in the interviews, such as preservation, authenticity, creation, and explore how the interviewees' concepts might be linked to IP1/IP2 concepts. After data analysis, the deliverable will consist of a list of criteria that a digital collection will need to incorporate to deal with preserving an aging collection across time.

Research Team:

Lead Investigator:	Howard Besser, UCLA/NYU
Co-Investigators:	Shelby Sanett, AMIGOS
	Henry Daniel, Simon Fraser University

Timeline

InterPARES approval	Sept 2003
Human Subjects approval	Nov 2003
Conduct interviews	Feb 2004
Transcribe interview	Feb-April 2004
Analyze data	April-Aug 2004
Write narrative report	Aug-Dec 2004
Review report w/Focus members	Feb 2005