



Contexts for Conservation

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ABSTRACT AND LINK TO PAPER

Moving on from the Original Experience: Games history, preservation, and presentation

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Melanie Swalwell's paper is currently being published in the DiGRA Digital Library and is available at the following link:

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http://www.academia.edu/4184809/Moving_on_from_the_Original_Experience_Games_history_preservation_and_presentation

Abstract

Moving on from the Original Experience: Games history, preservation, and presentation

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Collecting computer based media – hardware, software, digital games and media artworks, including source code – is an idea whose time has well and truly come. Yet the collection and conservation of code is still in its infancy in Australia. Code is almost completely invisible within local cultural institutions and archives. Even where coded items do exist, they are hidden and next to impossible to find, let alone access.

Born digital media items constitute a form of cultural heritage. They face risks that are unique – the degradation of hardware and software, obsolete operating systems, and arcane intellectual property laws that restrict digital preservation activities, to name just a few. Too often, governments and cultural institutions either fail to recognise the precarious situation of historic code-based media, or are not able to respond in an appropriate fashion, due to a lack of resources, know-how, or sometimes, will.

After outlining some of the challenges – for institutions and researchers – of developing collections of games and other software, this article will detail two current research initiatives. The "Play It Again" project is conducting research into the largely unknown (and sometimes hidden) histories of 1980s game development in Australia and New Zealand, ensuring that local titles make it into national collections and are documented and preserved, and enabling the public to once again play these games from the 1980s, without the need for high level knowledge of emulators. The "Australasian Heritage Software Database" seeks to draw together existing knowledge about all forms of locally-developed software in order to document it, to marshal a network of supporters, and to develop an enabling discourse that supports research into histories of software and digital preservation. Whilst these projects do not provide complete solutions by any means, a local discourse about the importance of collecting and conserving code is emerging.

Bio:

Melanie Swalwell is a scholar of digital media arts, cultures, and histories and Associate Professor in the Screen and Media Department at Flinders University. She is the author of many pieces – in both traditional and interactive formats – on the histories of the digital, in journals such as *Convergence*, *Vectors*, and the *Journal of Visual Culture*. Her current research is on the histories of digital games and software in Australia and New Zealand. Melanie is Project Leader of the ARC Linkage Project “Play It Again: Creating a Playable History of Australasian Digital Games, for Industry, Community and Research Purposes” (2012-14). This is a multi-institutional, multi-disciplinary project focused on Australian and New Zealand microcomputer games of the 1980s. The project is being undertaken in collaboration with the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, the New Zealand Film Archive, and the Berlin Computerspiele Museum. More information is available at <http://www.flinders.edu.au/people/melanie.swalwell> and <http://blogs.flinders.edu.au/play-it-again/>

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