
This research explores the current practices, potential methodologies, and user expectations concerning collaborative online filmmaking. Since the concept “Collaborative Online Film Projects (COFPs)” was created for this research and since little research has investigated preservation of online participatory film projects, the paper includes an in-depth review of similar concepts and of literature addressing the preservation of comparable areas of study, including crowdsourced art, interactive virtual worlds, and digital film.

The paper reports on a case study of the COFP platform Wreckamovie.com, including semi-structured interviews of individuals involved with the site. I also analyzed other COFP platform examples: the still-active hitRECord.org and the now inactiveopensourcecinema.org and the project A Swarm of Angels. Though more research is necessary, this paper concludes that though users value the preservation of their work, there is minimal communication about collaboratively preserving work and little engagement with active preservation.

Headings:

Digital Media

Digital preservation

Crowdsourcing

Motion pictures

Web archives
PRESERVING COLLABORATIVE ONLINE FILM PROJECTS: CURRENT PRACTICES, POTENTIAL METHODOLOGIES, AND USER EXPECTATIONS

by
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1. Introduction

Collaborative Online Film Projects (COFPs) use digital platforms and software to write, produce, and distribute films or some aspect of films (e.g. screenplays, soundtracks, special effects, etc). Though some aspects of COFPs may exist beyond the Web, COFPs’ creation, communication between collaborators, and dissemination exist primarily online via a forum, website, social network, blog, or some combination of those resources. Of the examples reviewed during preliminary research, there is little information available concerning data and/or project protection, recovery, or preservation, and it is unclear how different COFP platforms or users interpret the issue of project preservation. Existing digital preservation literature focuses on more conventional filmmaking methods, virtual worlds, social media, crowdsourcing, etc; however, COFPs have not been included in the discussion despite their similarities with these other topics. This paper’s research aims to fill this gap and will act as an exploration of a COFP community’s expectations within the context of current moving image and digital media preservation system practices and abilities.

Many COFPs address issues of copyright and ownership, but the priority at this time seems to be finishing any given project, then moving on to the next project: “Independent filmmakers typically do not plan for their work’s archival future while they are in the midst of making and marketing a film, and once they secure distribution, most move on
to their next project” (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Science and Technology Council, 2011, p. 39). However, digital formats can be preserved in a variety of ways and lost in a variety of ways. Without considering how each project may be saved or updated to maintain continuous access, there is a danger in losing hours of work and collaboration. Often, the safekeeping of a film’s different versions and its production process can be culturally valuable as well as absolutely necessary when files or hard-drives become corrupted or lost. I hypothesize that many collaborators maintain their own backup systems and hard-drives, but spend less time establishing methods for consistently updating and tracking projects and versions, developing agreements concerning preservation between collaborators, or assigning priority to preserving the communication and process that takes place in the platforms themselves. Through semi-structured interviews, I will explore how COFP users approach self-archiving, communication with collaborators, and preservation of their process to determine what role current digital preservation tactics may play in preserving COFPs.

In order to better understand the landscape in which COFPs exist and what role they play, I will review the established vocabulary and research areas related to collaborative art projects, online collaboration, and digital filmmaking and preservation. Additionally, I will identify the current state of the most relevant literature to COFP preservation and how the exploration of COFP preservation addresses similar issues and provides useful insight. Once the vocabulary and academic context surrounding COFPs are established, I will describe my research methodology and provide an evaluation of my findings. In addition to conducting a case study of wreckamovie.com, I also reviewed other examples
of COFPs and related sites or projects. The primary goal of the interviews was to gain perspectives on the current state, expectations, and practices of COFP users. Any assertions I make only matter if the people involved agree that COFPs exist and that preserving them is worthwhile. I will then discuss the overall implications of this research, limitations to this particular study, and potential future research on COFP preservation.
2. Literature Review

Collaborative Online Film Projects (COFPs) are a special type of creative art form that share a variety of qualities with other types of film, creative, and online projects but have yet to receive their own attention and title. These types of projects create unique issues for preservation, and these issues are worth consideration because they play a role in cultural, film, and “web” heritage. COFPs represent a methodology for filmmaking while also exemplifying the problems and dangers of creating and interacting in a dominantly online community – despite the global and technological advantages inherent in that community. The concern that motivates this paper is that despite the potential value of preserving these types of films and their production processes, the people and sites involved in COFP creation do not actively or even retrospectively put much thought or value into preserving them. The final product, if there is one, may be preserved or saved in some way – assuming the proper steps are taken – but the actual process and the valuable exchanges and versions in these collaborative projects may be lost when the site is shut down or if there is a system failure or a virus, or when – due to human error – content is deleted, lost, or corrupted. When one considers that, “Crucially, the process is, in the end, as much or even more important than the actual feature film” (Roig Telo, 2013, p. 2327), then the communication, digital assets, and versions involved in the process of a product’s creation are arguably just as valuable as the actual product.
Importantly, “communication” in this regard refers to information exchanged between collaborators regardless of format and may include: comments, personal messages, letters, audio or visual recordings, and notes. Digital assets, then, broadly refers to the many assets resulting from these communications or functioning in conjunction with them, and may include: “Interviews, scripts, correspondence, sketches of sets, special effects, out-takes, and even moving images of initial casting calls…” (Besser, 2001, para. 13). However, the flexibility of collaborative online work also lends itself to the creation of versions without a clear distinction of the “original” final product in comparison to the different iterations, copies, or copies with different metadata of that project, all of which may exist simultaneously with and/or are created any time after the initial release of material. As Catherine C. Marshall (2011) asserts, “the way we work with and share digital media, documents, and datasets has left us with complicated notions of which copy is the reference copy” (p. 92) – with “reference copy” in the case of COFPs meaning the “final product.” The existence of these versions leads to a network of versions, each with different archival values, and the version with the most metadata attached being the most valuable, since “[i]f metadata is doing its job, it enhances the value of the digital object” (Marshall, 2011, p. 107). It is in these things – communication, digital assets, and versions – that one can better explore and connect with the context of the item (for archival or research purposes); better understand the creative and collaborative process in general; better build or rebuild the product’s “story” and history in order to best preserve it; and better establish or answer questions such as ownership, date of creation, and technique.

As creative communities move toward an online environment as a collaborative production space, it becomes essential to explore how these related fields and
components address the issues of dealing with ephemeral products, multiple users, relationships between companies and creators, and adjustments or challenges to the norms established by conventional film archiving. Many sources about crowdsourced and collaborative projects focus on justifying these projects’ existence, often arguing that these projects deserve more attention, have earned a place in respected art communities, and hold a solid position among other forms of art and methods of creation. Typical discussions include Moosajee’s (2010) online article “Advantages of Collective Collaboration in Online Art Collectives,” in which Moosajee outlines the creative freedom and potential of these types of projects. Similarly, the blog “Indirect Collaboration: Collective Creativity on the Web” has several posts from 2010 that explore “the role of crowd-sourced input on the creative process, in anticipation of the upcoming South by Southwest Interactive Panel” (Alterio, Lillis, Grover, & Crane). These posts include links to examples of this type of collective creativity and pose philosophical questions about the concept of collaborative art in the digital world and its implications for art and for integrity, with the consensus being that collaboration encourages innovation, productivity, and diversity (Indirect Collaboration). However, there are not many articles that push beyond this argument of justification and into the realm of scholarship and implications – particularly for preservation and individual rights.

In order to properly explore these issues, this paper includes several objectives. First, it defines COFPs in relation to similar projects and creative initiatives. Second, it provides an overview and current analysis of film and digital preservation. The goal here is two-
fold: to provide a clear historical context for the creation of COFPs and to establish the vocabulary and preservation issues that will be used throughout the paper. I establish what COFPs are and what they are not. Throughout this paper, I explore how COFPs function in relation to other art and production methods – referred to as COFP “cousins” – that mirror COFPs’ structure, approach, and goals.

Additionally, since there is little literature discussing preservation issues specifically in terms of COFPs, the solutions and projects that address similar complications with preserving other unconventional projects are helpful starting points. COFPs have the distinction of being creative work, often derived from original material, which means that when considering these issues, it is equally important to consider how museums, production studios, and the art world in general address collaborative, multimedia projects, particularly in the digital realm. As Paula de Stafano (2003) notes, “the longevity of unique copies of moving image materials, like rare books and manuscripts, is inherently more threatened because they cannot be replaced” (p. 122). This is true for COFPs, since as a rule, their content is derived from original creative material. In order to understand the many considerations necessary for preserving COFPs, I explore literature across a range of topics, including film archiving and digital preservation, virtual reality preservation, web-archiving, and the preservation of COFPs’ “cousins.”

2.1 Defining COFPs

I have introduced the label of Collaborative Online Film Projects (COFPs) specifically for this research. As with many things in the ever-evolving online world, the specific set of film projects I had in mind for this research did not exactly fit into any pre-existing
group or type. In addition, when a project or type of project did fit within the scope of a COFP, it was inconsistently labelled as one of many other things, accompanied with a different set of qualifiers. In a sense, COFPs are a cousin to many other types of film projects, sharing some, but not all, characteristics with them, much like Ludwig Wittgenstein’s (2009, 4th ed.) concept of family resemblance as applied to language where there is “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail” (section 66).

I will provide an overview of the most prominent COFP cousins in order to provide the best context and to allow for the proper connection and understanding of terminology used in the readings and interviews. COFP cousins include: open source cinema/film/movies, remix art/projects, participatory film, and crowdsourced cinema/film/movies/art. Most importantly, what sets COFPs apart from their cousins is the combination of the terms “collaborative,” “online” and “film.” For the purposes of this paper, the following are the working definitions of these terms:

- **Collaborative** – two or more people working together toward a common goal, often within the context of a developed and supportive community. Collaboration involves active involvement, though at varying degrees, with the collaborators’ identities available or protected through the use of a user name or nickname.

- **Online** – primarily existing in a digital, web-based space with project organization and collaborators’ communication facilitated in an online format. Online in this sense also means connected to the Internet, though not all aspects of online work require an internet connection.

- **Film** – not referring to film stock, but rather more colloquially referring to motion pictures, movies, and moving images; any audiovisual production. This general use of the term also applies to “filmmaking” as it is understood as the practice of creating moving images and is not necessarily restricted to creating film on an analog medium.
Cassarino and Richter (2008) define the “reference production model for distributed collaborative creation” as peer-production, which is “[r]adically decentralized, collaborative, and non proprietary; based on sharing resources and outputs among widely distributed, loosely connected individuals who cooperate with each other without relying on either market signals or managerial commands” (p. 2). Perhaps most important to COFPs is their collaborative nature as supported by this concept of peer-production.

The word “collaboration” is often used to describe networks and initiatives that do not necessarily match “collaborative” as it is defined in COFPs. For instance, the online network the Film Collaborative (http://www.thefilmcollaborative.org/) is not a space for people to collaborate online, but instead a place for people with often completed projects to network and request distribution, marketing, or facilitation assistance. Launched in 2010, it advertises itself as the “first non-profit committed to distribution education and facilitation of independent film” (http://www.thefilmcollaborative.org/) “Collaborative” in this sense refers to the network of services provided to filmmakers through a certain non-profit service and not to the collaborative efforts of a community to create or develop a creative work. “Collaboration” in COFPs does not refer to the recruitment of post-production distribution and financial consultation. Collaboration in COFPs centers on the creative process of the project, at whatever stage, and it is facilitated through an online platform, meaning the “online” element of COFPs is not simply the exchange of contact information between two collaborators, but is also the active communication and potentially even the central method of sharing and/or changing content. In other words, COFPs do not simply rely on a site to provide a social network of film-related artists, but
instead use the site itself or the tools provided by the site for their development, collaboration, or communication.

2.1.1 Open Source Film

“Open Source” conventionally refers to a particular type of source code that is available to the public and may be built on or borrowed from to create derivative works (http://opensource.org/osd). However, the use of “open source” has been adopted by some film projects relevant to this research and may alternately be called open content films or open access films. For these films, open source often applies to the type of software used in the making of a particular film project. Though the film itself may not follow open access guidelines, the use of open source software categorizes it in a certain collaborative community who has worked in some way to generate the tools used in the creation of the project. Alternately, open source film may repurpose the phrase “open source” to move beyond the reference to code and software, and instead use it to denote that the film adopts similar principles of open access and the encouragement of creating derivative works.

An example of both types of open source is the Blender Community and its subsequent films. The Blender software is an open source 3D animation suite that draws from a large community of volunteer users and programmers to develop its design and build its tools. Anyone may use the software for free and contributing to the software development is actively encouraged on the Blender website. Blender productions incorporate the software to create the visual effects for short films, which are produced by a select group of volunteers and filmmakers. Thus, the films produced by the Blender Foundation use
open source software created by the Blender community in order to debut new features to
the software and to encourage collaboration and creativity through using the Blender 3D
suite (http://www.blender.org/about/). The films – called Open Movies or Open Projects
– are then released under the Creative Commons license, which allows for the reuse and
adoption of the final product by the public. For instance, the 2012 Open Movie Tears of
Steel – a sci-fi short film set in a robot-vs-humans post-apocalyptic world – was reshot in
2013 by the Chinese Academy of Sciences Institute of Automation who used Tears of
Steel’s computer graphic assets. Thus, the film was created using open source software,
made available as an “open source/content” film, then recreated using a mixture of
original and openly available content a year later. (http://mango.blender.org/about/).

Alternately, Blender software can be used by any filmmaker or artist to create his or her
own content, without any obligation to maintain open access to that work. Regardless,
Blender films are not examples of COFPs since COPFs fall more closely in line with
participatory filmmaking (discussed below). As Antoni Roig Telo (2013) explains,
“Blender movie projects … are not considered participatory filmmaking, as they select
only a small number of participants from among the most skilled members of the Blender
community and proceed under tight creative control” (p. 2315). Blender movies are not
collaboratively created in an online environment, though they may later be remixed or the
software behind their special effects may be adjusted in an online forum. However, the
actual production, planning, and design of the films occur offline and are controlled by a
specially selected workforce.
As earlier stated, many sources use the phrase “open source” more loosely to apply not only to software source code but also to the film itself, which means that the software involved may or may not be open source, but that the content created and the final film product is created with the intent to be freely and universally accessible. The resulting film exists under an open license of some kind, such as the Creative Commons license, whose purpose is “to create a middle ground between ‘All rights reserved’ and the Public Domain” (Cassarino & Richter, 2008, p. 18) where creators maintain a level of ownership of the original works but allow the work to be manipulated or shared openly. In either case, open source film functions more as a designation that often involves collaboration, but does not require it. Thus, open source encourages the open access and sharing of content and product, which means anyone can use, change, or see the content. It does not mean that more than one person created the content nor that the content was created or developed using an online platform.

Another example of an open source film project is A Swarm of Angels (ASoA), which began in 2006 and has since been disbanded or postponed. The film is open source because every aspect of the film is created, voted on, and developed by an open community, with the intention being that the final product would be openly available as well. Community participation created and revised the film’s script, character development, posters and promotions, and funding. In this case, the broad concept of open source can be further broken down to include participatory filmmaking, which will be discussed in more detail below. In many ways, ASoA also qualifies as a COFP, since
the project included an interactive, collaborative community, an online format or platform, and a film-based project.

“Open source film” is a broad category and includes to an extent remixed film, crowdsourced film, and COFPs. However, despite this broadness, it is not all-encompassing and does not apply to all remixed art, crowdsourced art, or COFPs. Concerning COFPs in particular, some COFPs qualify as open source because the ultimate goal of the project is to produce a freely available film and/or the process of creating the project involves open source software. However, these projects do not have to subscribe to open source doctrines and may instead rely on commercial software and function as collaborative efforts to create a for-profit, independent film. In other words, some COFPs are open source films, but not all of them, and some open source films are not COFPs at all. Importantly, the literature that discusses issues pertinent to COFPs uses “open source film/cinema/movies/content” as a general classifier. However, the issues that may arise with COFPs are not necessarily the same as those that occur with other open source content and films, particularly because of COFPs’ strong collaboration element.

2.1.2 Remix

Remixed film is similar to open source film because they often exist under the umbrella of the Creative Commons license or a similar open access license. However, remix has more specific characteristics that distinguish it from other open source content. Kathleen Tuite and Adam M. Smith (2012) define “remixing” by paraphrasing the prominent law professor Lawrence Lessig (2008): “Remixing is the process of taking elements from
existing artifacts and changing or recombining these elements to create something new” (p. 16). It embraces the concept that art can be built upon and inspired by other art. Issues such as ownership and final products are less serious and play second fiddle to the larger goals of exploring creativity and encouraging art through collaboration. Remixed film can involve actively collaborating on a single product through remixing others’ work or can involve taking an already existing work and remixing it with something else, essentially creating an all new work. Because of the disinterest in or at times blatant disregard of copyright law, remixed art has issues with copyright and ultimately exists in a gray area when works such as popular music, images, or other work not yet in the public domain are incorporated. The philosophical argument behind remix art is similar to the “death of the author” argument - i.e. once a work is created and shared, it exists independent from its creator, and in the case of remix, is open to repurposing and “re-ownership.”

Remix builds on existing works, unlike COFPs that can involve existing material but can also focus on wholly new and original content created collaboratively over time. Remix does not necessarily just involve film or video, and can instead feature visual art, music, performance art, etc. With such a spectrum and variety of artistic formats, remix does not require an online presence at all. For instance, Tuite and Smith (2012) developed a mobile application called Sketch-a-bit to explore remix creative culture. This application focused on drawing and allowed users to build off of other participants’ drawings where “the value created in Sketch-a-bit comes from enjoyment of participating in the collaborative drawing process” instead of the specific need or intent to “complete a
specific task or deliver a concrete artifact at the end” (p. 16). Remix, in this sense, becomes a sort of rebel amongst these types of projects, since its existence and the participation in it does not necessarily value the production of a single item, the ownership of a particular work, or the legal or commercial benefits of a collaborative work. Whereas open source content emphasizes the concept of open access and crowdsourcing and COFPs emphasize the end goal of creating a particular production or work, remix emphasizes the process of creation and the experience and freedom of taking something someone else created and adding to or repurposing it. In essence, as Tuite and Smith (2012) conclude, remix projects provide “a place to exercise one's creativity, both through practicing the technical skill of drawing to produce an artifact, as well as through consuming (interpreting, appreciating, critiquing) the creative works of others” (p. 22).

Another example, beyond Sketch-a-bit, is the practice of machinima, in which gamers use the gaming world to script, perform, and record artistic projects, such as films. Roig Telo (2013) defines machinima as “the production of linear audiovisual content from a computer-generated virtual environment, such as a videogame or a virtual world” (p. 2319). Many of these projects use online games such as MMORPGs (Massively-Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games) and are organized largely within these interactive worlds, using players’ avatars and the game’s features to create the works. These works function as forms of remix art, because the “machinimasts” remix and repurpose the original content of the game to create new works or build upon current situations. By using creative content to create something that functions independently from the original’s purpose, machinima exists in a gray area that has largely gained legal
permission to create through contract rights with the game developers (Kraus, 2011, p. 103):

By such acts of civil disobedience, machinima makers generate ‘counter-friction in the machine,’ to use Henry David Thoreau’s resonant phrase, forcing game publishers to negotiate with them about the production and dissemination of their art (p. 105).

Importantly, as much as machinima functions as remix art, it also can be classified as participatory film as defined and explored in the following section, since in addition to remixing an original work, machinima is also collaboratively creating new work through an integrated community and environment.

2.1.3 Participatory Film and Crowdsourced Art

Tuite and Smith (2012) define crowdsourcing as “the method of breaking down a large task into small pieces that can be accomplished by a large number of often non-expert individual contributors” (p. 16). The value of these types of works as creative projects “comes from the distinct style that each individual brings to the piece and how no single artist would have been capable of such variety” (Tuite & Smith, 2012, p. 17). The flexibility, anonymity, and global nature of the online environment support crowdsourcing and helps make it realistic on a variety of scales. However, the Internet’s role is somewhat different (or can be) with crowdsourcing as compared to COFPs, since the former involves recruitment and involvement with a “more, the merrier” approach. COFPs do not need a large number of participants or even support, with the focus not being on getting as many contributors as possible, but rather on creating the best product possible by tapping into the creativity of a community. COFPs focus more intently on the collaboration of participants, and are not designed “to have each worker contribute
independently at the same level, or sometimes at a few separate levels with clear pathways between them” (Tuite & Smith, 2012, p. 17), as is typical with crowdsourced projects. An alternate way to approach the distinction is to reference one of the first uses of “crowdsourcing” by Jeff Howe:

Simply defined, crowdsourcing represents the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call. This can take the form of peer-production (when the job is performed collaboratively), but is also often undertaken by sole individuals. The crucial prerequisite is the use of the open call format and the large network of potential laborers (2006b, para. 4).

In this sense, COFPs function more closely with the peer-production model of crowdsourcing than with the “simply defined” idea Howe suggests, which focuses on an indefinite number of participants responding to an “open call.”

Participatory film would be more in line with COFPs; however, participatory film functions within a broader scope. It does not necessarily exist online, nor does it have to have the same sense of collaboration. Roig Telo (2013) classifies projects that could arguably be COFPs (his example of Star Wreck Studio’s Iron Sky, for instance) and evaluates the role that practice theory plays when scholars consider the development of COFPs. “Practices” in this sense refers to the social behaviors that influence or populate a person’s and group’s interactions, choices, actions, and motivations (Roig Telo, 2013, p. 2319). Roig Telo’s goal is to show “how the observation of emerging practices is crucial in participatory projects’ early stages, when participants are negotiating meanings related to hierarchies, internal organization, relationship with other cultural domains…, leaderships, and affective ties” (p. 2319). By exploring practices, he is able to create a
structure and organization of participatory filmmaking, which he can then apply to multiple examples. Importantly, Roig Telo defines participatory film as something distinct from crowdsourced or crowdfunded projects. As has already been acknowledged, none of these categories are mutually exclusive, each with exceptions that allow for multiple types being assigned one example. However, crowdsourced and crowdfunded projects typically ask “people to contribute to a project (in terms of labor or money, even if rewards or tokens are given in exchange),” which is “an insufficient condition of participation” since there is no implicit element of collaboration or creation for a greater artistic, mutually beneficial purpose (Roig Telo, 2013, p. 2315).

What sets participatory film apart is the sense of involvement and collaboration. Roig Telo (2013) acknowledges the similarities that participatory film may have with remix projects and open source media, concluding:

On the other hand, releasing a creative project under an open license allowing appropriation and remixing is also insufficient, unless it is an integral part of a participatory project. In view of the previous statements, it must also be said - contrary to some widespread discourses, and despite the importance of engagement - that just making people feel part of the project is not a sufficient condition in itself: nor is engaging people in a multimodal experience, as in a transmedia project (which is not to deny the potential of the combination of transmedia and the participatory) (p. 2316, emphasis added).

In other words, allowing something to be remixed does not necessarily mean it supports the participatory model, unless the original or parent object was created as a participatory project. This is an important distinction, since this narrows the scope of participatory films and sets them apart from COFPs, which do not necessarily follow this strict need for mutual participation. As such, for Roig Telo, hitRECord would not be an example of participatory filmmaking since its design and structure revolves around remixing other’s
original work without clearly defining the level of participation or integrating the remixed version with the parent version. However, Star Wreck’s - and thus wreckamovie.com’s - film *Iron Sky* is an example of participatory film since the project established from the beginning how every participant contributed something new to build and create the final product. Under the COFP model, both hitRECord and wreckamovie’s *Iron Sky* are COFPs, since they encourage collaboration in an online format to create, develop, and revise a film project. Regardless of the differences, considering crowdsourced projects and participatory film projects enables us to better contextualize and approach COFPs.

Building on the concept of open source, Winget (2011) highlights the qualities of participatory filmmaking and, by extension, of COFPS:

> Further, the open-source movement and *the ensuing “maker” culture* have given the general public tools and the mindset to interact with media in a way that was not possible even fifteen years ago. Instead of passively receiving media like movies, music, and art created by professionals, *individuals are participating in cultural production, creating their own materials, often based on the objects of material culture*. These artifacts of *participatory culture* include objects ranging from materials that look a lot like traditional media movies, music, and art that simply have *different production and distribution models to materials for which we have no vocabulary to describe and no model to provide access* (p. 33, emphasis added).

However, scholars are attempting to create a vocabulary to describe these materials and to design models that improve access while also protecting ownership.

Participatory and crowdsourced films can and likely do exist on a much larger scale than COFPs, with the potential for an unlimited number of participants. As a concept, participatory and crowdsourced projects depend on a complicated set of relationships as defined by Literat and a complicated set of “practices” as defined by Roig Telo.
Concerning the former, Iona Literat (2012) provides a comprehensive and in-depth overview of crowdsourced projects, with an aim to create a working vocabulary and category group so that these types of projects can officially be included in the scholarship for art, creativity, and crowdsourcing. She includes all forms of art – written, visual, audio, etc. – with examples of each type (p. 2970). Literat (2012) focuses primarily on online *crowdsourced* art, which she acknowledges is a disputed term (p. 2963), but for her purposes conventionally involves a large crowd of people who are “not yet a community” (p. 2972). Roig Telo (2013) incorporates Literat’s language when discussing participatory film, acknowledging that in the beginning stages of a participatory project, the project “can be either the task of a creative core team (what Literat calls the ‘alpha artist’) or the self-organizational effort of a community” (p. 2315).

Significantly, Literat (2012) argues, “in view of its reliance on the artistic contribution of a large pool of usually anonymous participants, this type of art raises important questions about notions of collective creativity, authorship, collaboration, and the shifting structure of artistic production in the new digital environment” (p. 2963). Online crowdsourced art represents the “radical democratization of the artistic process,” which challenges traditional approaches to classifying, processing, creating, and interacting with art (p. 2973). By involving a variety of people at a variety of levels, this form of art thrives in the online environment and is susceptible to all of the pitfalls of the unsteady online world – invasion of privacy, copyright issues, dissemination, and preservation. Literat (2012) defines three main types of participation with and in crowdsourced art: receptive, which is passive and consumption-based; executory, which involves varying levels of
participating that all depend on a predesigned project; and structural, which formally involves participants in the authorship and design process of the project (p. 2975). Each type of participation carries its own challenges, and based on Literat’s presentation, one may infer that the more transparent and structured the participation, the more community-oriented the project becomes, which leads to fewer people overall being involved. This type, based on Literat’s vocabulary, best represents COFPs, though some better qualify as executor because of their predesigned nature. Overall, Literat (2012) concludes, “Online Crowdsourced art can be seen as the product of two specific structures: the conceptual or aesthetic structure of the project itself and the technological structure of the Internet as a facilitating platform,” which are interrelated and present “their own particular affordances and pitfalls” (p. 2979). For Literat, hosting crowdsourced art online presents the art’s biggest challenges as well as its most promising innovations. These challenges with online crowdsourced art mirror COFPs’ challenges, even if COFPs generally involve smaller, more focused communities in more open access environments.

2.2 Exploring Preservation

There are two main components to Collaborative Online Film Projects (COFPs) that require deeper exploration in order to fully orient COFPs in the discussion of preservation: film and digital. The “film” aspect encapsulates the current trends and issues in digital moving image preservation as understood by production studio archives and preservationists. The “digital” aspect refers to the issues surrounding digital environments and born digital objects. In the following pages, I will explore these two aspects by reviewing preservation as it relates to digital film, virtual worlds, web archiving, and the COFP “cousins” aforementioned.
2.2.1 Digital Preservation

Understanding the current best practices for motion picture preservation and archiving will provide insight into what the film industry prioritizes when processing a moving image project for cultural and commercial preservation. The current methods for film-based objects allow for an expected lifespan of 100 years within a controlled environment (Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, 2007, p.1); however there is not a reliable method to preserve digital assets for longer than a fraction of that, due to issues with obsolescence and the requirement to continually migrate content to new formats (2007, p. 21). Though when actively managed, migration and other archiving tactics become the most viable options, “[t]he consensus is that although digital videotape stored in proper environmental conditions can last for at least 5 to 10 years (or longer), there may be no new videotape format to migrate to when the medium nears the end of its shelf life” (Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, 2007, p. 33). As pointed out in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences’ Digital Dilemma, the best methods for long term preservation are still relatively immature compared to the methods for preserving analog film. Because of the continuing evolution of the archival standards for formats and access of digital content, preservationists must be mindful and active in how they approach the preservation process. This means being able to adjust to the demands of the changing filmmaking methods and products while also maintaining the ability to emulate older formats for access and migration purposes. Whatever method is established now must be revisited regularly in order to maintain quality control.
By discussing digital moving image preservation practices, one must explore not only what professionals are doing but also how digital filmmaking practices in general are shifting. This includes trends towards collaborative work, independent filmmaking, digital filmmaking, and the use of open source software. An important conclusion from motion picture preservation literature is the assertion that digital film contains more than just the final product:

When it comes to cinema, digital objects commonly include sequences of digital image frames that make up digital masters, multiple digital sound tracks, foreign-language dialog tracks, and text files containing subtitles in various languages. They may also include digital camera originals, digital audio original stem files, pre-mix/pre-dub audio files, and other digital ‘assets’ (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Science and Technology Council, 2007, p. 13).

Regardless of the amount of content generated by one film production, the standard in Hollywood is still to save everything, “starting with the various versions of the finished movie, but also including all the original camera negative (OCN) film, all the original audio recordings, all the still photographs taken on-set, all the notated scripts and more” (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Science and Technology Council, 2007, p. 5). In part, this practice is in response to not having a clear plan or definition of how to manage all digital assets and content, since a reliable method of digital preservation that satisfies the standards of film preservation still has not been developed (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Science and Technology Council, 2007, p. 14, 16). However, preserving and archiving digital motion picture objects is a riskier and more expensive process (2007, p. 2) than compressing and storing objects in distribution libraries, with enough unknowns that content is being created faster than is the best archival management approach (2007, p. 5).
When considering a digital object for preservation, there is not simply a single file that must be filed away. Instead, one object is made up of various components that not only create the whole, but that also contribute to the contextual make-up of the object. One should also consider whether it is important to retain multiple formats or versions that accompany any copy of a digital video. This is even more important in the age of digital filmmaking, when independent filmmakers can easily create and distribute their work cheaply and when several versions and formats of one movie can exist at any given time. COFPs are most likely comprised of independent filmmakers and artists, who operate “outside of the major Hollywood studios [and] supply 75 percent of feature film titles screened in U.S. cinemas” (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Science and Technology Council, 2011, p. 3). These are the people contributing the most to modern cinema, but as the Academy’s 2011 report *Long-term management and storage of digital motion picture materials: A digital motion picture archive framework project case study* points out:

Most of the filmmakers surveyed for this report have given little thought to what happens to their work once it is completed. Most pay for some type of storage for the master version of the completed work, but few store their film masters in proper environmental conditions or manage their digital masters using appropriate preservation practices. Many depend on distributors (traditional theatrical distributors, packaged media, pay TV) or new “streaming” platform providers to take responsibility for preservation” (p. 4).

Independent filmmakers often aim to develop and finish a project, then to move on to the next project (2011, p. 4). Without proactively considering ways to preserve and manage the digital content created by these artists, archivists and cultural heritage librarians risk losing an enormous amount of creative content to preventable issues, such as obsolescence. This is all the more troubling when one considers COFPs, which involve
not one independent filmmaker, but several, all collaborating at various levels, potentially from all over the world. The decentralized nature of COFPs coupled with the online environment enables artists to engage with a variety of projects at one time, but it also confounds the issue of moving quickly through digital content without thinking critically about storage and preservation. This becomes even more complicated, because “in the United States, the widely dispersed and diverse use of motion picture film and now, digital recording technology, has made motion picture preservation a highly decentralized activity spread across hundreds of institutions and organizations” (Maltz, A., Shefter, M.R., & Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Science and Technology Council, 2012, p. 42). Currently, it is unclear how sites that host these collaborative efforts support or manage the content created on them or if, at all, collaborators are encouraged to save and migrate their work.

This idea of proactive archiving is vital to the preservation of COFPs, and its practice within the creative community is unclear – an element that this research seeks to clarify. Since “archives estimate that their collective digital holdings will grow from approximately 183 terabytes in 2009 to more than 2.7 petabytes by 2014” (Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, et al., 2011, p.5), the ability of archives to retroactively preserve that amount of data is unlikely. Additionally, the consensus seems to be that in their current state and with the current demands on archival staff to digitize and “go digital,” archives are ill-equipped to handle the burden of maintaining the hundreds of terabytes of data being created by artists in the digital world (de Stefano, 2003, p.120; Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, et al., 2011, p. 5). Therefore, the most
effective way for independent film work – on- and offline, collaborative and individual – to survive past its creation is to encourage the culture of filmmakers to preserve, backup, and archive their own work. As Winget and Aspray (2011) argue:

New titles move into the distribution library faster than they are added to the archive because the distribution library is used to generate revenue while the archive is intended to act as insurance against any loss of corporate assets. But if digital motion pictures can become “born archival,” they can be ingested into the archive quickly and easily as part of a largely automated file-transfer process (p. 7).

However, filmmaking by its nature is a collaborative process and preserving documentation of the trends in filmmaking – the versions created during one production, and the contributions of the community involved – requires acknowledgment of preservation’s importance and clearly established methodologies to incorporate proactive preservation into online filmmaking projects. As the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences (2007) asserts, “We believe that standards are most likely to be successfully implemented and adopted when the user community of those standards takes an active and leadership role in their development” (p. 55). It is much easier and more realistic to prevent something from being lost than trying to regain it once it is gone; and when one considers the sheer volume of content created for any single project, assessing the value of a project’s individual parts most reasonably relies on the creator or creators. In film archiving, “Image file formats, their associated ’wrappers,’ filenames, metadata, and metadata registries all are of limited usefulness unless there is industry-wide agreement on what they are and how they are to be used” (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, et al., 2007, p. 55).
2.2.2 Virtual World Preservation

COFPs exist primarily in a digital world. As such, many of the issues in capturing, preserving, and archiving born digital, interactive media share basic similarities with COFPs. This includes discussions around preserving websites, crowdsourcing initiatives, and virtual world preservation. COFPs involve communities that exist almost strictly online, where participants’ primary form of interaction and production is in the digital world and identity and credibility are blurred and hidden behind monikers and profiles. This brings up concerns about authenticity, credibility, and joint authorship rights. Additionally, the product itself, be it a completed film or an element of a film – a scene, a script, the special effects, etc. – exists as a digital artifact whose creation may have happened in several ways – physical and digital, all over the world, etc. – but whose “final” version exists online, possibly in various locations including the designated program or website shared by the community. The nonlinear and data-heavy process of conceptualizing, adding to, finalizing, and possibly re-visiting the project raises issues about original order, what pieces deserve preservation, and what technology best captures the project. This differs from analog media, since digital media “consist of complex interactions between technologies and users, and necessitate fundamental shifts in the way we think about preservation,” including considerations of “the nature of the digital system” and “what makes a particular artifact of digital media important or noteworthy” (Aspray & Winget, 2011, p. vii). When there are so many versions and elements to one project the “wish to preserve and present the original artwork in its original form is greatly undermined by the difficulty of determining which ‘original’ to preserve”
(Christensen, 2002, p. 39), which Christensen (2002) notes as the “greatest challenge to the archives and cinemathques” (p. 39).

As Catherine C. Marshall (2011) points out, copies or versions of one digital object may exist at the same time, in many locations, leading to the question: “Where, then, does the ‘real’ or reference copy of any digital artifact reside? Which version(s) do we consider archival? How will we find this reference copy when we once again want it?” (p. 90). The online environment allows for the sharing and manipulation of one item across a multitude of networks and digital spaces in addition to supporting communities “who use new media [and] have a much more autonomous and collaborative attitude” (Aspray & Winget, 2011, p. ix). Conceptualizing the type of relationship one must develop with these types of items is key to preserving them since they have no linear trajectory, and instead have a life cycle that potentially includes multiple final versions, each with different contexts and elements. Part of this context is the metadata created within any given situation, which provides important and unique contextual information worth saving and considering. As Marshall (2011) says, “the authoritative copy of any of our personal digital belongings is spread among many stores, and what we regard as the authoritative, archival digital item, the one we want to keep (possibly forever), has become essentially decentralized” (p. 91). Though Marshall specifically refers to personal digital belongings in this passage, her concern is with all personal archives and particularly with the personal archives of artists. Thus, this concept of self-archiving one’s digital belongings in relation to his or her art directly relates to the decentralized nature of COFP collaborators’ own methods of preserving and saving their work.
Furthermore, when considering this in terms of COFPs, we must consider that these versions may exist in a variety of formats on each collaborator’s personal computer or at his or her workstation. There is no uniform way to save or share the content, and the conversations and interactions between the collaborators in the online communities act as one of the few ways one can connect the versions to a larger digital object and contextualize the creation of a product. The interactions that happen on the platforms hosting COFPs contextualize the otherwise decentralized projects, and thus it becomes advantageous to explore ways to preserve these interactions in addition to the content eventually created.

As Lowood (2011) asserts when discussing virtual worlds and interactive online gaming preservation, it is important to preserve not only the virtual worlds created at any given time, but also the events, history, and social aspects of the players within those worlds (p. 4-5). Without doing so, historians’ “utility for the interpretation of specific events is quite limited” (Lowood, 2011, p. 11). Instead, “we need to devote more attention to the kinds of events and activities that occur in these places and how to document them, much as an archivist or historian would in the real world” (Lowood, 2011, p. 15), which leads “us away from thinking about the preservation problem in terms of objects and artifacts and toward focusing our attention instead on events, actions, and activities” (Lowood, 2011, p. 7). Virtual worlds contain activity beyond the code that exists on the servers, much like COFPs, whose real story may rest not just with the final version produced, but also with the conversations and versions that built up to that final production. Without capturing the process while it is still available to capture, one risks losing the rich cultural
significance behind this form of filmmaking. Additionally, like COFPs, much of the realistic preservation decision-making rests with the users, gamers, and creators, since they are the most familiar with the content created, the most emotionally and contextually informed and invested in the content, and the best positioned legally due to the established adaptation rights between the game creators and the gamers or users (Kraus, 2011, p. 108-109).

2.2.3 Web Archiving

When discussing the preservation of digital objects in the online world, it is important to consider the current practices for web archiving. Web archiving, loosely defined, is the process of systematically capturing web content – particularly websites or webpages. The most common method is using a web crawler or website copier – also known as “client-side archiving” – to capture content using technology similar to the crawlers used by search engines (Masanès, 2006, p. 22). Other methods include more manual efforts called “transaction archiving,” which depends on the user, and “server-side archiving,” which depends on the web publisher (Masanès, 2006, p. 22). A prominent web archiving initiative is the Internet Archive, which regularly crawls websites and catalogs them by URL on its website. Archive-It is a service of the Internet Archive that provides tools for crawling sites, supporting digital collections of websites, and displays via the Wayback Machine. The most comprehensive approaches to web archiving depend on the cooperation and commitment of the administrators of the websites being archived, since the crawlers cannot capture pages or certain content without the participation or permission of a given site (Masanès, 2006, p.9). Sometimes the content is freely available
to capture, however, other times the site has special built-in code built whose sole purpose is to block web crawlers.

Additionally, the design of the website may mean there is a large amount of hidden content or content stored on private servers that require special permissions or “insider” access in order to capture content. Ultimately, web archiving’s biggest hurdle in terms of COFP preservation is generating enough support and awareness to start archiving the sites beyond the homepages and to do so with enough permissions. As is, sites like hitRECord.org, which is in essence a remix culture for-profit production company, have homepages and external webpages captured – such as: about, contact, browse. However, deeper or internal content is not captured and the site administrators would need to give permission and work collaboratively with an organization like the Internet Archive to capture this content. Or it would need to actively build its own web archive and account for format difficulties inherent in trying to preserve streaming media, audio visual files, web images, and interactive comment sections. Sites like wreckamovie.com would similarly require special permissions from website owners to allow for complete capture, and even then, this process likely would not capture personal messages between collaborators on the site. Thus, web archiving is an essential tool for preserving the platforms on which COFPs exist and function, but is not the one and only answer to COFP preservation needs. As Julien Masanès (2006) asserts, “This characterization of the Web as a distributed hypermedia openly and permanently authored at a global scale entails that Web archiving can only achieve preservation of limited aspects of a larger and living cultural artifact” (p. 17). The cooperation of the individual projects and self-
archiving of the users are also essential to capturing and archiving the full “story” and context surrounding any given COFP.

2.2.4 The “Cousins”: Open Source, Remix, and Crowdsourced

With film, digital media, and web archiving and preservation in mind, let us now revisit the “cousins” discussed earlier. Prominently, remix projects have garnered a diverse amount of preservation attention. The documentary film *RiP!: A Remix Manifesto* and the website [www.opensourcecinema.org](http://www.opensourcecinema.org) associated with the film are great examples of a remix project experiencing a mixture of web archiving and a lost opportunity to better preserve its content. The now defunct website has some captures available through the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine, but captures are sporadic and incomplete. They do include comment sections and discussions connected to projects on the site as well as general homepage and website information, with 178 homepage captures (many starting in 2010 reading “offline”) and under ten captures for each deeper webpage. The site was essentially a COFP platform, encouraging people – much like hitREcord.org – to upload and remix various types of media, create collaborative projects, and build a community of collaborative work and artists. Though some of these pages were captured by the Internet Archive, clearly not all elements and pieces were preserved – such as uploaded video content and images. As a result, future access to materials from these projects – at whatever stage of completion or dissemination – is at the mercy of their creators and the site’s administrators. Since the Wayback Machine’s captures only represent a sampling of conversations and collaboration during a small window of time, there is a variety of content overlooked and lost. As a result, future researchers or archivists would have limited context to help understand the nature of collaborative online projects and little to
no access to the type of art resulting from them. In this case, a piece of remix culture’s history depends on the few Internet Archive captures of opensourcecinema.org and a brief Wikipedia article created in 2009. A part of the digital revolution of remixing, touted as the future of art in the documentary, is threatened with obsolescence. Issues of preserving remix projects are not limited to the opensourcecinema.org example. Tuite and Smith (2012) observed:

The key difference from past [remix] work is how Sketch-a-bit users work from the output of an anonymous peer who had access to the same tools and peer-inspirations they did, as opposed to a single, centrally-provided reference artifact (such as a blank canvas or a music video frame) (p. 17).

In such a collaborative environment, there is relatively little hierarchical structure, and ownership is shared among many, leading to no authoritative force to represent or initiate a preservation plan.

Concerning participatory film, Roig Telo (2013) listed the following sets of practices in participatory filmmaking: performative, organizing, production, community, self-promotion, finance, and circulation (p. 2326-2328). These can overlap and at times completely encompass one another. For the purposes of this paper, I would add to Roig Telo’s list of practices the “preservation or protection practice,” which involves the act of preserving, backing up, and versioning content created in these communities. Roig Telo (2013) defines self-promotion practices as a set of practices “around the promotion of the organizational form itself, as distinct from promotion of the film proper” (p. 2327). He provides the following examples of performative practices:

Participants are invited to play at being filmmakers, and also to play with the aura of filmmaking and its processes and imaginaries. The dynamics of these playful
practices represent playing with the rules as much as playing by the rules, thus clearing the way to the transformative and innovative… (2013, p. 2328).

It follows, then, that preservation or protection practices would represent the systems of preservation adopted by users as individuals and as groups to safeguard and catalog their activity and created content. These systems easily exist on an individual, independent level, which means they are only structurally acknowledged or confronted when something goes wrong (something is lost, deleted, obsolete, etc.). This is particularly true for Roig Telo’s example of A Swarm of Angels, whose tasks depended on a complex and mixed hierarchical structure that would unravel if its participants failed to back up the contributions on which the rest of the community depended in order to interact, vote, and delegate.

In order to support preservation practices in such a collaborative and extensive community, communication and organization are essential. If “[t]heir most important feature may be their inextricable connection to decision making...their distribution of creative control,” (Roig Telo, 2013, p. 2315), then, Roig Telo theorizes, the community needs to maintain a level of transparency in communication among all its factions (p. 2315). This would include decision making concerning preservation and archiving, if and when it became an issue or topic. As mentioned above, the focus often is not on preserving the work of current projects, and so it is likely that these conversations never happened. It is perhaps partly due to this urgency to create without mindfully and actively archiving that the once functioning website is no longer live and the domain name is for sale.²
3. Methodology

I conducted a case study of the website and community for wreckamovie.com. Because reviewing one example of a COFP community does not adequately represent the aforementioned issues, I also interviewed filmmakers familiar with these types of projects and also reviewed similar projects. The goal of this research was to explore participants’ priorities, approaches, and understanding of their relationship with COFP preservation. The exploratory nature of this research means that my participant scope was broad and included a mixture of people directly involved in wreckamovie.com and people related in some way to collaborative online filmmaking. Of the twelve interview requests I sent over the course of two months, I received eight responses, and six useable sets of answers. Two sets of answers are not included in the final paper because they were received at too late a date or did not provide the necessary permission to use the answers in the paper.

Participants were selected based on one or more of the following criteria:

a) Recent activity (within the last 2 months prior to the initial interview request) on the COFP website

b) High “Karma” points - which indicate activity on the site and reliability, and peer support as voted by other users

c) Involvement in past or current COFP projects or related “cousin” filmmaking projects

d) Recommended by another participant
Initial iterations of the research included reaching out to site administrators for these projects in addition to users. However, the lack of response led to a redesign of the overall approach and a refocus to users and individuals who may have relevant insight into COFPs and COFP preservation. Professional independent filmmakers, amateur filmmakers, and hobbyists were all included in the selection criteria. Additionally, producers, bloggers, designers, writers, and system engineers were all considered for interviews if they matched one or more of the above qualifications. Because of the global nature of COFPs and of wreckamovie.com in particular, interviews were conducted via email or Skype, with most interviews being conducted through email. Though follow-up questions occasionally occurred, most answers are results from the initial set of interview questions. Because of the exploratory nature of this research, semi-structured interviews were the ideal format for questions and information gathering, as opposed to surveys. Questions were developed by reviewing the literature and assessing what preservation questions have been asked before to filmmakers and artists, and what would be relevant to web users. The questions focused on user experience, personal approaches to backing up content, and impressions of preservation of online content.

In addition to the interviews, I reviewed other COFP sites to provide more examples and context for COFPs and for the primary case study. Websites that discuss collaboration online and its preservation were explored to gain more insight into the active internet filmmaking community as it presents itself. This helps to contextualize how the wreckamovie.com community fits within the larger collaborative online world and how others have reacted to it and similar projects.
All interview transcripts were coded with random letters. The random letters corresponded with interviewee names, and this information key was stored in a location separate from the interview files. Interview files were stored on a password protected laptop. Two interviews were transcribed from audio recorded Skype interviews, and the rest were downloaded as text from email interactions, which were subsequently deleted.

Each interviewee was asked how he or she would like to be represented in the findings (anonymous, pseudonym, name, or profile name), and though many interviewees gave me permission to use their real names, I have opted to keep the participants anonymous though I have not redacted reference to their individual projects when and if they are mentioned. Many participants, because of the nature of these platforms, already publish their names, photos, and contact information on their profiles. However, I clarified with each participant that he or she is comfortable with his/her responses being associated with the respective case study platform.
4. Case Studies

In the following pages, I will first review the primary case study wreckamovie.com and the results of my interviews, with the following names used as pseudonyms: Tyler, Felicia, Thomas, Joshua, Amanda, or Arthur. I have organized the results into three categories: Backup Methods, Collaborator Interactions, and Reaction to Preservation. To supplement these findings, I will provide three additional COFP examples: opensourcecinema.org, hitRECord.org, and A Swarm of Angels.

4.1 Wreckamovie.com

Wreckamovie is a non-profit collaborative community started by Star Wreck Studios, a Finland-based production company responsible for the Star Wreck movies, which are science fiction, Star Trek parodies. The wreckamovie platform was created in 2007 to
encourage online film collaboration, using open source software, and providing an environment for filmmakers to post film projects (of a variety of genres) in order to recruit collaborators. Wreckamovie has a hierarchal structure to its collaborations, typically including a project leader and a linear production plan for individual projects. The goal of wreckamovie is to provide a platform through which people may produce and create professional-looking films and distribute them using a myriad of internet tools. It was inspired by the production process of the first Star Wreck movie and originated as a forum, which developed into a full-fledged website as demand and involvement grew. Now, almost eight years later, the community is much less active and there are only a handful of “wreckers” still actively and consistently engaged with the site. According to all of those interviewed for this paper, the site is “dying” and will likely be phased out completely in the next few years, partly because it is difficult to maintain financially in its current state and partially because production activity has slowed down tremendously.

The community is open to anyone to join and all collaborators are searchable, though sending messages and viewing complete profiles requires a user password. Wreckers can start a production, enlist help, post results, comment and provide feedback on projects, and maintain a blog to track production news and highlights. The platform does not support large file sharing or streaming, so many files are shared through third party mechanisms – links to other sites or via emails. This decentralizes the process of using wreckamovie even more, since many users store their production with wrecker feedback on the site, but store other materials related to their collaboration in email correspondence, social networking sites, or file sharing software. The community is
global, with many of its most active members being European filmmakers who also worked on the original Star Wreck production. Users “earn” karma points by performing tasks and providing support in reliable and consistent ways, which helps to build users’ reputations. Each user’s profile lists the productions s/he is or has been involved in and for how long. As one participant put it:

[T]he whole Wreckamovie platform is about people getting things done together. . . Wreckamovie gives us an awesome place to meet and share our work with like-minded people, but it is only a tool provided “as is,” as far as I have seen and experienced so far, most of the work is done “behind the scenes” and only sent through using the forum system.

4.1.1 Backup Methods

Backup methods ranged from regular, multiple unit backup systems to rarely fleshed out, after-thought backup systems. The most popular methods were a combination of hard-drives and cloud storage, with a focus on the final product versus versions and process. Arthur emphasized the advantages of publishing a final product online as a form of preservation – a point also made by Kraus (2011) when discussing machinima – and as a way to avoid backup failures. Felicia and Tyler depend largely on cloud storage to both share projects and versions over long distances and to store final versions, in addition to storing locally on a hard-drive. When asked if there had been any instances of losing data or content and how that may have affected current approaches, all participants had examples of times when they lost data or content due to a preventable error – such as physical copies getting lost or a file getting mislabeled or overwritten. The process of having to reshoot or redo content because it was accidentally erased or formatted incorrectly is a waste of time and money, particularly when the production only has a small window in which to work.
Multiple locations for storage are ideal because they provide duplicates if one backup options fails. However, these are not necessarily consistent. Generally, participants either had technical expertise advanced enough to easily develop complex backup systems or they had more of a focus on filmmaking and a more casual approach to maintaining backup systems. Everyone acknowledged the importance of backing up work, but the reasons varied. Felicia and Tyler were much more concerned with saving the final version of the project and did not see the value in saving anything else once the project is completed. This supports assertions made by Catherine C. Marshall (2011), who argues, that when people “actually handle versions” (p. 107) of their work, “sometimes they are only interested in the most recent version; infrequently, it makes sense to keep an ordered set of evolving versions” (p. 107). Amanda and Arthur acknowledged the potential need for other versions and for drafts of works, but also voiced concern in how complicated the process of tracking and storing that much data may become over time. However, overwhelmingly, the participants expressed a desire to keep content due to sentimental or practical reasons while admitting that realistically doing so presents challenges. As Thomas succinctly put it, “I try to keep all in-between versions as much as possible, but constantly running out of space makes me delete them at one point.” Joshua, who is not a wrecker but who has worked with many filmmakers, observed, “The final product is important but I know filmmakers who have lost their original footage and regretted it when an opportunity came to create a new work out of it,” which illustrates the aforementioned theme of filmmakers in these situations valuing the creation and completion of a project more than the consistent archiving of it. In a real sense, as was
also noted by Thomas, being able to revisit old works can also function as sources of inspiration and learning.

Backing up content requires regular migrations and attention, particularly for active projects. Participants’ opinions on this issue ranged broadly, with one person saying that he only updates his system once a year at most and another saying that she spends a few hours every week moving and backing up data. The variety of formats used for any given film contributes to the level of attention given to the backup method, since if the wrecker is primarily saving text files and contributing text to the project, his or her backup system will require much less space and time than the head of the project who is likely storing the text contributions in addition to the audio and video files. Additionally, Arthur spoke at length about the burdens of “saving everything” even if that is his ultimate goal:

> I try to keep everything. I have about 20 external Harddrives [sic] containing all of my work of the last 13 years. I even kept 2 old editing computers with old software configurations. Just in case that at some point I want to open a project and it is not running on a modern computer system. I have stored all tapes, mainly miniDV or HDV but also BETASP tapes and even old Hi8 stuff. So video and sound files are there on the original tapes or CDs and everything is backed on Harddrives [sic]. Additionally to the 2 old editing computers there are my 2 current “new”ones.

Opinions and approaches to metadata were inconsistent and often metadata was not considered at all. For those who do pay attention to metadata, they have developed a complex system of naming that begins with the creation of the file and follows through to the end of the project. For others, the size of the project and the number of collaborators contributes to how much attention and time is dedicated to metadata. Tyler, for instance, did not find developing a naming system and tracking metadata to be particularly
important for during the production process beyond the conventional names given to shots from the camera:

...it was not really in the need of metadata because it was… I was the only one working on it so I just need to know, I mean for the video clips we could just look, double take and watch what it is … so we didn’t have metadata because it wasn’t really necessary since we only got two people doing the job so, but that would have taken a lot of time for something we didn’t really even use.

Joshua directly indicated that he “[relies] on the metadata generated by cameras, sound equipment, etc,” for personal projects. Meanwhile, Amanda outlined her process in more detail:

All images and other attachments to my shots are kept in separated folders of [sic] my hard drive (which I try to back-up regularly). I of course keep several more versions than those (“final”) uploaded for others to see; most frequently different stages of development (marked with progressive numbers and sometimes a distinctive word in the file name), and variations. Something like:

Wreckamovie/Iron Age/Cover/ (Website/project name/item) will contain:
- Cover v.0 sketch.psd
- Cover v.1 red.psd
- Cover v.2 blue.psd
- Cover v.3 FINAL.psd
- Cover v.3 FINAL.jpg

Amanda also mentioned that she often uses dates to better organize collaboration work sessions in order to better visualize versions and brainstorming results.

4.1.2 Collaborator Interactions

Generally, the participants said they used the wreckamovie site when it first launched in 2007 as a convenient platform to find different skilled artists and hobbyists and to gain feedback for certain creative decisions. Over the years, the groups that formed led to more contact and interaction through personal messages and third party platforms.

However, the structure and community built into wreckamovie still provided useful
collaboration, and there are several film projects using the site to announce updates, recruit collaborators, and gain feedback. Under the wreckamovie model, there is an understood hierarchy of actors, starting with the production leader and production assistants and ending with occasional contributors. The site’s community guidelines stress the need to establish order and to respect the decision-making by production leaders: “...decisions must be made to make things go forward. If you are a member of a production, trust your Production Leader the visionary of your project and don’t take rejection personally” (www.wreckamovie.com/guidelines). This sentiment was reflected in participants’ responses, with several people asserting that ultimately, preservation is the leader’s responsibility:

Amanda: If I am a simple member of the crew, I will not discuss the matter and just back-up my work for my own pleasure and purposes. As a project leader, I will keep most valid contributions submitted by my crew in separated folders within the production one, and probably ask them privately to send me better quality versions of their work (or different stages) than those publicly shared… I keep my own files when I contribute to a larger production on WAM [wreckamovie], even assuming the project leaders will keep their own back-ups of everything we send them…

Arthur: As the creator and producer of Mission Backup Earth, which is my first collaborative project, I try to archive everything as I do it usually with other film projects.

Tyler: Yeah, that [preservation of content and projects on the platform or shared through the platform] seems more like it’s more up to the project leader to do that.

Even with the expectation on the project leader, as Arthur pointed out, there is a lot of content that could be lost if conversations and plans are not established early in the project concerning expectations of backing up content and sharing the content:

One reason [for not having all the project files from every collaborator] is that it is more time consumptive to upload the amount of data related to a project online. The upload time to a cloud drive is still pretty slow.
But nevertheless I recently started to ask everybody to not only upload the final product but also the project files and the footage they used. So I am collecting more and more data and project files that could be of later use. This is important because it is not sure how the others preserve their work (if at all). And as this is an ongoing project done by volunteers, people come and go. So in order to build on previous work or reuse it at a later stage, it is necessary to backup the data.

This illustrates the potential issues of working in a collaborative environment, both online and in real life – orchestrating the sharing and the storing of every piece of the project and clearly communicating those goals to your team. At wreckamovie, these participants acknowledged the need to preserve certain parts of their work but openly admitted to not putting forth much effort to establish active preservation and organization plans with their collaborators, no matter the level of participation.

The assumption is that every player will be responsible and sensible enough to back up his/her content and work. However, participants rarely spoke with others about their methods or about the overall project preservation strategy:

Felicia: I never spoke with other wreckers about their storage method (I am just interested in my own data).

Arthur: There have not really been conversations about how to preserve the work. We only managed data transfer through cloud servers or wreckamovie.

Amanda: Admittedly, I have not discussed these matters very often with the people I worked with. However, I believe that is strictly related to the different level of involvement in a specific project, and number/types of “bosses”.

Tyler: It’s [saving wreckamovie content] never communicated at wreckamovie.

However, some did acknowledge the potential importance of having an open dialogue about preservation among collaborators, even if it did not occur.
4.1.3  Reaction to Preservation

Interestingly, participants either saw the value in preservation and in archiving sites like wreckamovie and expressed an overwhelming amount of support: “It’s crucial to save people’s hard work for future.”; “Every type of preservation of art is valuable.” Or participants did not think that saving the projects, content, or versions created with or through sites like wreckamovie deserved the effort and time it may demand: “None of our work has a status of ‘important cultural heritage’, so I think there is no need of complicated preservations. It’s just for my own ‘memorie.’” In other words, all participants had an opinion about preserving COFPs and these opinions varied and at times were contradictory. Though some saw the works created in collaborative settings as hobby and personal projects that did not constitute the extra attention or effort of preservation, these same participants spoke at length about the sentimental and cultural value of accessing old home videos or films that, due to the easier preservation of such formats, have survived over decades:

...I remember one of the main shareholders got hold of all of the tapes [from a bankrupt TV station] and then he didn’t want them anymore and so my friend has now like five years of weekly shows but so, I mean that’s also something which, at the moment he got them like five years after we stopped, it’s not interesting. But after twenty years, it starts to get [interesting] so you have to try to keep that over twenty years before it gets interesting and have a historical point of view.

The value of these items, then, increased over time and their significance historically and culturally correlated with being able to revisit them many years after they were created, even if they did not immediately seem valuable. This contradicts the assertion that saving content created on wreckamovie does not have value, and illustrates how the value of content is hard to calculate, particularly for someone’s personal works. As Arthur argued:
I think every artist tries [sic] to preserve his work as much as possible. Especially because only very few ever become successful (respected, famous & rich) with their work. But that doesn’t mean that the work is worthless. It is what a person has produced in his lifetime, beside of our children, the only thing that stays. Also you never know if an artist is discovered postmortem and curators [sic] are doing a retrospective [sic] with his work. In that case it is good to preserve the work as good as possible in an archive.

Most importantly, participants were aware of the issues of copyright in a collaborative environment and how that both complicates and justifies preservation efforts. When asked if they expected sites like wreckamovie to protect and save the content shared on the site, every participant answered “no.” Amanda qualified her answer:

I expect some “basic” backup features to be implemented by most websites, but I rather “expect” that whatever I load online might be prematurely deleted when the site gets damaged or goes offline, or get copied/abused by people I know nothing about and who will [sic] not even bother crediting me for the original art/text.”

While Arthur suggested that these kinds of sites could theoretically save all of the content if there was reliable funding, even then there is a danger of the site going offline for some reason and to rely on the site is a gamble. He concluded, “So if wreckamovie goes down, the development [sic] history of our series will be not preserved.” Joshua noted, “There is a strong and vocal movement in copyright reform, and big companies like Google have been able to make progress in monetizing orphan works, thus making it economical to preserve them,” acknowledging that this may help to encourage and sponsor more widespread web preservation. There was a general concern that by actively preserving works on sites like wreckamovie, the material would be more readily available to the public and thus at risk of being stolen, though no one could offer an example of this happening with wreckamovie. Alternatively, some participants acknowledged that ownership could be more accurately tracked and asserted through online preservation.
Lastly, in the discussion of who should be responsible for preservation and whether outside institutions may play a role, Felicia and Tyler expressed concern that archives and other cultural institutions simply would not have an incentive to spend the time or money on preservation projects of sites and productions like wreckamovie. Though Amanda did not express this view, she did wonder about the role outside institutions could play and how they would determine prioritizing these types of preservation projects. Her suggestion was that ultimately, perhaps, the responsibility of preserving the sites rests more with web developers rather than with the users.

4.2 Other Examples

Since the interview pool was limited, exploring the structure, history, and preservation of other COFPs helps to contextualize wreckamovie and its situation. First, I will revisit the example of opensourcecinema.org and the ways it has been preserved and not preserved by the Internet Archive. Then I will review the production company remix site called hitRECord.org, which has a for-profit element that clarifies copyright issues by necessity. Last, I will review A Swarm of Angels (ASOA), a common example among the COFP cousins, and review how its lack of web presence suggests reasons for platform preservation and active archiving.

4.2.1 Opensourcecinema.org

As has already been explored in section 2.4.4., opensourcecinema.org is the website created to support remix projects like the documentary *RiP!: A Remix Manifesto*. Though the website no longer exists, through some digging, one may find it by using the Internet
Archive’s Wayback Machine. In true COFP fashion, the website’s captured homepage states:

Open Source Cinema lets you create your own videos online, remix media that you have on your computer, as well as remix other people’s media from places like YouTube and Flickr. You can also connect with others by sending personal messages, commenting on remixes, or even joining projects that others have created.

Through the Wayback Machine, one can explore the pages as they appeared in 2010 (Figure 2). However, the Internet Archive collection only represents portions of the website and does not allow for a full exploration. Though other captures seemed to have occurred as recently as 2012, there are no images or pages available for those times (Figure 3) and it appears that at that point the site was offline.

[Figure 2: Internet Archive Capture of opensourcecinema.org Homepage]
Exploring the site leads to project pages with captured comment sections discussing the progress of various initiatives and creative works. Most of these comments, however, are associated with monikers from the web community and not real names, and there is no access to the behind-the-scenes, user profiles. If one were to try to archive the presence of opensourcecinema.org and the projects created and associated with it, it would be difficult to track down who the users were and whether they personally archived their contributions. This is an example of how a COFP’s process, versions, and life cycle can be left to speculation simply because there was no active effort to systematically preserve and organize the content in an accessible manner. Thankfully the Internet Archive captured some of the site, but this is just the tip of a creative iceberg whose content would require the active regeneration and collaboration of users – a requirement that seems unlikely to be met given the culture of independent filmmakers and artists and the fact that four years have already past.
4.2.2 hitRE Cord.org

HitRE Cord is a collaborative for-profit production company, whose online community is free and open to anyone willing to register. By registering, one accepts responsibility that all created content is original and does not infringe copyright. Collaborators are not limited to filmmaking, though audiovisual projects seem to be the most popular featured collaboration. Visual artists, writers, and musicians are welcome to contribute work and projects, with the understanding that anything posted to the site may be downloaded by someone else and used for his or her own project. If hitRE Cord uses any of these projects or “Records” in their own productions, then contributors get credit and, in the case of the production earning a profit, a cut of the profits. The site was created by actor and filmmaker Joseph Gordon-Levitt in 2005 and has been growing as a company and as a platform ever since.

Ownership or credit for work is represented through a tagging system. The original record exists as the original creator’s record, on his or her page, and if someone else
chooses to use it, he or she may tag the original creator when the remix is re-uploaded. This creates a network of references and organizes the content on the site through a series of basic metadata, such as creator, but also using other potential tags, such as the format of the record or the genre. In addition to individual records, people can create collaborations that often pose a certain theme or assignment on which people can build. It is not explicitly stated anywhere on the site how the content is protected, backed up, or preserved. However, the for-profit status of the production company implies some sort of failsafe.

Though collaboration is clearly a mission of hitRECord, there is no real option to send personal messages to users. All communication happens in comment sections or via records, out in the open. This has become a contentious issue in the help and discussion forums of the site where some users have repeatedly suggested there be an option to send personal messages or otherwise correspond with users in a more limited way for particular projects or “collaborations.”

4.2.3 A Swarm of Angels (ASoA)

A Swarm of Angels was revolutionary for its time, and was a common case study for scholars interested in digital copyright issues and crowdsourced art – as illustrated by the references already made to it in this research. Unfortunately, the site no longer exists and it is unclear if the project will return. By February 16, 2009, the ASoA website announced it was going to be undergoing maintenance (Figure 5). Over time, this announcement changed. In April 2009, “undergoing maintenance” became “making a transformation” and the reference link was changed to a twitter account (Figure 6). By
2011, the page announced it was “on pause to make use of the disruptive innovation and knowledge gathered in previous active phases” (Figure 7) and as recently as 2013, the site announced it would be returning soon (Figure 8). However, the twitter account is overwhelmed by bots and has not had an official ASoA update in years. The URL no longer leads to an ASoA announcement, but rather to a website written in Thai.

**Figure 5:** Wayback Machine capture of the ASoA’s Announcement of going undergoing maintenance.

**Figure 6:** Wayback Machine capture of the ASoA 2009-2010 website announcement.
ASoA was built on the idea of using a crowdsourced community to fund and produce a film, using democratic approaches to assign responsibilities and to make creative decisions concerning characters, script development, themes, and promotional material. Though it garnered a loyal community, the growth of the community eventually stagnated and this could be a potential explanation for its digital disappearance. With all
decisions depending on “the swarm,” many issues concerning copyright, applying creative commons license, and distributing responsibilities developed without any clear solution. The Internet Archive did capture the website during its more active years (Figure 9).

Like opensourcecinema.org, ASoA represents a COFP whose full story and cultural contribution may be lost due to the ephemeral nature of the digital world. Despite the active community, the dedicated creators, and the positive media attention, it is difficult to find any examples of content created by ASoA aside from the basic captures through the Wayback Machine. These only illustrate so much, since the videos and embedded material do not function and the deeper, user-only web pages – including the forums – are not available or were not captured.
5. Discussion and Limitations

In the following pages, I will provide a discussion of how these case studies show COFPs’ as cultural artifacts deserving of considering in the dialogue for digital preservation. Following the discussion, I will explore some of the limitations of this study and how they affected the results and conclusions.

5.1 Discussion

It could be beneficial to preserve these sites and projects. As acknowledged in the interviews, there is a cultural value to the brainstorming and interactions and production history that occurs on these sites and this information may be lost forever when the site goes offline. Because of the inconsistency in users feeling the necessity to save this level of content, there is even more of a danger of the content being lost due to neglect. However, like any other film project underway and like other significant film trends of the past, by capturing all levels of these projects’ development, one is capturing the necessary and historically significant context connected to the projects involved. As was said numerous times in the literature and interviews, a major aspect and value in COFPs is not simply the final product, but the experience and journey made by the collaborators who, through COFPs, gain new skills, develop professional and personal connections, and access a new form of art and exposure to a different creative outlet. In this sense, it is not simply about the data being created, but about the relationships and interactions
occurring over time. To ignore this aspect of COFPs, one risks losing a large part of COFP culture.

In *The Digital Dilemma 2*, the researchers concluded from their own interviews that the filmmakers “did not seem to recognize that when today’s current events become tomorrow’s history, an audio or visual record of these events may not exist, because today’s digital systems do not offer guaranteed long-term access” (Maltz, et al., 2012, p. 28). This is also true for COFPs, particularly when the expectation is either: that publishing content online means one is preserving the content, or that whatever is created does not deserve preservation attention in the first place. Regardless of the arguments for or against those two views, ultimately the result is the same: content gets lost when proactive preservation could have prevented it. Overwhelmingly, the Academy of Motion Pictures reports active collaboration among filmmakers as well as between filmmakers and archives (2011, p. 5) as a way to help prevent lost content and to preserve audio visual work. By encouraging users to self-archive and to bring preservation into the conversation with collaborators, the online community can begin tackling preservation in a proactive and manageable manner. Additionally, by acknowledging the role that the user plays in the overall preservation of the platform used for COFPs, one can more consciously participate in initiatives to save or capture web content.

By generating some form of a discussion about COFP preservation, this research helps to bring issues of COFP preservation into a more public consciousness, which may help lead to shifts in awareness and approaches. As always, technology and financial support
create limitations for preservation initiatives. Concerning the former, however, cloud services and cheaper storage are becoming more the norm as information shifts into a more data-driven world. Preserving these projects depends on COPF creators and archivists actively considering these tools and incorporating regular preservation methods—such as migration—into regular routines. Concerning the latter, with technological support becoming cheaper, the accessibility to quality filmmaking also leads to the accessibility to quality preservation sources. As long as outside institutions like cultural heritage institutions and archives are willing to provide expertise and consultation and filmmakers and web developers in COFP communities are willing to consider long-term or short-term preservation as a part of their routine, collaborative efforts could develop that keep costs of labor low. In all likelihood one cannot save everything, but with the enthusiasm regarding online communities and global creative collaboration, acknowledging special creative niches and actively preserving them is both possible and worthwhile. Otherwise, there is a risk of creating a gap in film history simply because digital preservation seemed too overwhelming or the projects seemed too independent.

Lastly, though some participants expressed skepticism in the need to preserve the digital assets and process of COFPs, they also often acknowledged the general value of cultural artifacts and the vulnerability of digital formats. These conflicting ideas illustrate the complicated relationship between assessing the value of one’s personal contributions and the value of a more general artistic concept (e.g. the preservation of an individual’s comments and versions for a COFP created last year versus the preservation of a notable example of a filmmaking method whose popularity and activity changes constantly). In
reality, these two things are the same, with the former being a piece that makes up a part of the latter. It would be unfortunate if COFPs were largely lost because the conversation for why preserving them in as complete a fashion as possible – as inspired by current film preservation and interactive world preservation methods – simply never happened.

5.2 Limitations

Ideally, this research would have involved many more participants, with much more time to spend interacting with the community. Unfortunately, time constraints and issues with participant responses resulted in a limited number of interviews over a small amount of time. Also, since many COFP participants live outside of the USA, scheduling timely correspondence was difficult and at times unsuccessful. On a related note, many participants speak English as a second language, which means that though they were able to communicate clearly and consent to participation without trouble, there were some more complicated concepts or terminology that may have been lost in translation. If there had been a larger pool of participants or more time to revisit and discuss issues, this variable may have been more easily controlled.

Additionally, the focus of this paper is on users in particular, however, the research would have benefited from more insight from archivists and filmmakers outside of COFPs. In the future, a broader scope should be considered in order to better establish where COFPs fit within the digital preservation discussion. This also means including site administrators and web designers so as to better understand the capabilities and goals of the case study platforms. This was originally the plan for this research, but had to be readjusted due to a poor interview response rate.
Lastly, the research would have benefited from more in-depth case studies involving interactions with users. This would have provided more insight into COFPs from different perspectives and experiences while also creating a more detailed understanding of the current status of COFP as an approach to filmmaking.
6. Conclusion

As stated in the beginning, the goal of this research was to explore how Collaborative Online Film Project communities approach self-archiving, communication among collaborators, and preservation issues as a whole. I hypothesized that users likely worked independently to back up their own content and likely did not make much effort to create long-term project preservation plans with their collaborators. Though this proved to be mostly in line with the literature and with the results of the interviews, future research would benefit from a uniform, wide-reaching survey with a broader participant scope. COFPs are somewhat complicated to classify, since they share many qualities with a variety of other artistic projects without fitting into one group alone. In fact, this is true for most COFP “cousins,” whose characteristics often overlap and contradict each other. In the future, a more comprehensive classification system would help break these projects down further and allow for more concentrated research. In the meantime, considering how COFPs – and by extension, their cousins – can be preserved by reviewing the preservation of more established digital objects proved the most insightful. Ultimately, as one participant observed:

In my opinion COFPs are the only way for independent amateur or semi-professional projects to do complex (or simple) productions. For instance without COFP I would have no chance at all to do a sci-fi project without a budget. But it is not only CGI and postproduction, but also any kind of film-project and stage can be done through COFP. People can find each other and do amazing things together and never ever have to meet in real life.
Thus, these projects and interactions are worth saving and acknowledging. The philosophical question, then, is to what extent should these sites and their content be preserved? Or as another participant argued:

So even if the full website went offline tomorrow, I would still have all of my contacts, all my pieces of work in its different phases, and all my chat logs when it comes to the things I may have decided together with someone else. Sure, it would be sad to see our “blog posts” and witty comments to each other’s posts disappear… but I feel that the most valuable part of our work lies elsewhere to start with; hence we would not risk “losing hours of work and collaboration” at all.

This research cannot answer the question of value and can only conclude that the seemingly small pieces that led to the creation of a project help to provide context to the whole. By not considering the small parts, one risks losing the understanding and value of the final product.
Notes

1 According to Roig Telo’s 2013 article “Participatory Film Production as Media Practice,” “in 2009 ASoA went into hiatus - though it was not officially canceled - after working on two screenplays, designing different visual concepts, and experimenting with participation strategies…” (p. 2322).

2 As of April 2014, the domain name www.aswarmofangels.com appears to have been bought by “Aswarn Fangels,” a site written entirely in Thai.

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Appendix

Interview Questions - Preserving Collaborative Online Film Projects: Current Practices, Potential Methodologies, and User Expectations

Collaborative Online Film Projects (COFPs) utilize digital tools and software to write, produce, and distribute films or some aspect of films (e.g. screenplays, soundtracks, special effects, etc). Though some aspects of COFPs may exist beyond the web, COFPs’ creation, communication between collaborators, and dissemination exist primarily online via a forum, website, social network, blog, or some combination of those resources. Of the examples reviewed during preliminary research, there is little information available concerning data and/or project protection, recovery, or preservation and it is unclear how different COFP platforms or users interpret the issue of project preservation. Current digital preservation research focuses on more conventional filmmaking methods, virtual worlds, social media, crowdsourcing, etc; however, COFPs have not been included in the discussion despite their similarities with these other topics. This paper’s research aims to fill this gap and will act as an exploration of the COFP community’s expectations within the context of current moving image and digital media preservation system practices and abilities.

Many COFPs address issues of copyright and ownership, but the priority at this time seems to be more focused on finishing any given project and then moving on to the next project. However, digital formats can be preserved in a variety of ways and lost in a variety of ways. Without considering how each project may be saved or updated to maintain continuous access, there is a danger in losing hours of work and collaboration. The goal of these questions is to better understand how you have approached and understood preserving your collaborative projects – in your personal workspace as well as in the online communities to which you belong. Oftentimes, the safekeeping of a film’s different versions and its production process can be culturally valuable as well as absolutely necessary when files or hard-drives become corrupted or lost. My goal is to find out how you feel about preserving these types of collaborations and what kind of methods you may use to preserve them.

Because I have to follow certain research protocols, I need to clarify a few things with you before the interview questions:

1. May I use your name in my research or would you like to have a pseudonym / be anonymous? (Regardless, I will not share any private information without your permission)
2. May I associate your answers with wreckamovie.com and/or with your specific film projects?
3. The interview should not last more than 45 minutes and will include semi-structured questions. This means that I have a list of guiding questions, but the intention is to really just hear what you have to say.
Interview Questions - Please answer all that you can and provide as much information as you would like.

1. How do you backup your creative works? What kind of storage do you have/use?
2. What kind of personal copies or versions of your work do you keep?
3. What is important to you for backing up work? The final product? All of the versions?
   a. What about metadata (information about your project, like dates or subjects)? Comments and feedback? Drafts?
4. What kind of conversations have you had with other collaborators about preserving your collaborative work?
   a. Do you think these kinds of conversations are necessary? Do they come naturally?
5. Do you expect websites for collaboration or open source film projects to protect your data and content?
6. Would you consider working with an outside institution (like a library, archives, museum) to track or preserve aspects of the site and creative process?
7. What do you see as setbacks in preserving these types of works?
   a. Advantages?
8. Do you think this type of preservation is valuable? Why or why not?
9. How have you developed the methods / approach you use now?
10. Was there a time when you had to change your approach because something was lost or because of some other special circumstance?
11. What kind of role do you see yourself having / do you think you’d like to have in the preservation of collaboratively created works?
12. I have made a lot of assertions about what I believe COFPs to be and what they are not. Does the concept of COFP make sense to you? Do you see them as being distinct from other types of projects or do you have any comments in general to make?
13. You have already suggested some others that I could contact, but is there anyone else you would suggest that I contact who may have experience with COFPs or with similar issues of preservation or collaborative work?
14. Do you have any questions or anything else to add?

**Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may cease participation at any time. Additionally, all information shared during our correspondence will be stored in a secure location, with identifying information stored separately. All recordings and files associated with our correspondence will be deleted at the end of this research.**