

Media Arts Centers as Community Archives: Investigating the Development of Archival Practices in Non-Profit Media Organizations

Lindsay Mattock, University of Pittsburgh

Abstract: This paper will introduce my dissertation research, which seeks to investigate the archival practices developed by media arts centers. Media arts centers were initially conceived as a network of organizations that would provide resources supporting independent media production in the United States. Sheldon Renan, former director of the Pacific Film Archives, imagined a distributed network of film centers, supporting the production, exhibition and study of media; serving as information centers about media resources; and working with the Library of Congress to support regional preservation efforts.** While the relationship with the Library of Congress was never realized, media arts centers now represent a network of hundreds of media organizations across the United States that support a full range of activities related to the production of media, including: funding, distribution, exhibition, study, and preservation.

My research is framed by two questions: (1) What can the history and development of three differing media arts centers – Pittsburgh Filmmakers, Paper Tiger Television, and Termite Television Collective – reveal about the role of media arts centers in the collection and preservation of independent media and the development of archival practices in non-profit media organizations? (2) How can the identified practices impact the future management of media collections in archival organizations?

The concern for independent media in this context is a concern for media produced at the local and community level. The organizations identified for this study serve as valuable resources in the communities that they serve. These media centers are sites for production, providing tools for artists and developing original programming; educational sites, teaching local students, residents and community groups to use media technology; and distribution sites, providing artists with venues to distribute their works and opportunities for the local community to interact with media products.

These media centers also serve as archives, both formally and informally. For example, Paper Tiger Television has systematically collected and preserved the media they have produced on videotape. Pittsburgh Filmmakers, on the other hand, collects media more informally serving as a repository of last resort for films like *Pittsburgh* (1958), a film produced for the city's bicentennial celebration. While Termite Television uses its website as a means for archiving and distributing the media produced through the collective.

The concept of community archives provides a useful framework for understanding media arts centers. As non-traditional archival spaces, the concept of community archives provides a means for understanding these organizations on their own terms,

rather than in archival terms. While the practices at media centers may not meet archival standards, the collecting practices developed in these institutions demonstrate a desire to preserve and share the media that is produced within these organizations. These practices may translate into the archival field, providing new insight into how archives can interact with media collections, the expectations that users may have, and impact scalable solutions for the preservation of media.

**Sheldon Renan, "The Concept of Regional Film Centers," *Sightlines* 7, no. 3 (1973/1974): 7.