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**Experimental Publishing as a Strategy for
Preserving Research-based Art:
Documenting Naked on Pluto on Monoskop wiki**

online workshop

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The conservation of online artworks asks for new
ways of documenting. In this workshop, Dušan
Barok, Julie Boschat Thorez and Aymeric Mansoux
offer their perspectives on the possible
documentation of the artwork *Naked on Pluto* by Dave Griffiths, Aymeric Mansoux and
Marloes de Valk. The heart of *Naked on Pluto* is an artist-built, open source, multi-player,
online video game that has served as an experiential impulse for a wider examination of
privacy in the age of social media through exhibitions, workshops, lectures, interviews, books
and websites. More than simply a piece of artistic software or a conceptual work, the artists
view this work more broadly as research. This leads us to thinking about preservation
differently. What makes research-based art different to other kinds of work, and what does it
imply for preservation?

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Research-based artworks pose a new challenge to preservation. Like changing artworks, these
works cannot be preserved under the assumption of material fixity linked to traditional art
conservation. Just as in the case of installations, performances and digital art, their
presentations rely on the interpretation of the work's identity. This is because they are not
constituted by singular material objects such as painting or sculpture, but by a range of
components and elements with variable relations and dependencies as well as aesthetic and
functional roles (Laurenson 2001, Laurenson 2006, Van Saaze 2013). The overarching approach
developed over the past two decades to preserve changing artworks has been to produce
detailed documentation of an artwork's exhibitions, alongside the storage of its dedicated
physical components, digital preservation of its media components and emulation or
migration of software components, next to the option of reinterpretation (Matos et al 2015,
Ensom 2019, Wijers et al 2017). This approach assumes that the trajectory of any changing
artwork can be described as a succession of its iterations presented at exhibitions.
Research-based artworks, however, are usually manifested in a wider range of ways. They may
be centred on a single art object intended for exhibitions, but they may also involve various
physical and digital objects presented outside exhibition setting, activities in public and digital

space, workshops, publications, accumulation of research material and archives, and so on. These works typically defy not only objecthood associated with painting and sculpture, but also iterativity associated with installations and performances. In this sense they operate similarly to processual works whose "preservation" relies more on further development and continuation rather than re-creation (Bosma 2011, van de Vall 2015, Dekker 2018). Instead of exhibition space, their main site of activation is debate and discourse, the situation of knowledge production (Steyerl 2010).

APPROACH

How can we preserve these works? We suggest an approach that remains rooted in documentation practices and extends them into what we call experimental publishing. It is inspired by a range of online research publications created by various art preservation initiatives in recent years. They bring together expert knowledge about selected artworks, along with documentation and views from their creators. Among the latest examples are Net Art Anthology, an online retrospective of net-based works created by Rhizome, and Digital Canon, an online catalogue of historical digital artworks from the Netherlands, launched by LIMA. Another reference are preservation-oriented initiatives of various online subcultures, from private torrent trackers such as Karagarga, the retro gaming database project No-Intro, to the community endeavor Archive Team. These projects show the positive potential of refining the practices of preservation, conservation, documentation, circulation, and archiving in the context of collective practices.

In practical terms, we suggest to approach documentation along four axes: archive, manifestations, narrative, and context. Firstly, available digital and physical material related to the art project is recorded. This material can be considered the project's archive. To collect its traces in one place in a structured manner an inventory of this archive is created. It may include articles, files, data, websites, and so on. Secondly, the project's various public manifestations are recorded under distinct headings, for example: objects, exhibitions, other activations (events, interviews), and research process. While exhibitions may play major role, no less important for gaining a sense of the breadth of the project is to record other manifestations. Sections may have subsections and they may be organised chronologically, especially if we deal with more large-scale projects. It is important to include sources for every record at this point. Subsequently, introductions can be written for individual sections as their narrative summaries. The resulting introductions may be compiled into a single article that gives a general introduction to the whole scope of the art project. The article is informed also by insights from reception and historical context of the project. As a result, the respective axes may be presented on distinct pages (folders), each providing a different entry to the project: archive, history (or chronology), story, and context.

WORKSHOP

In this workshop, we will discuss the roles that collaborative and experimental publications can have for research-based, processual artworks and practices. As a case study we will discuss the process of documenting the artwork *Naked on Pluto* on the platform Monoskop that runs

on MediaWiki software. We will question affordances and limitations of preserving the legacy of these types of works through online publishing. We also seek suggestions from participants for similar works as well as possible approaches or experiences with preserving them. These will be explored in a hands-on part. No previous knowledge of programming is needed.

SUGGESTED READINGS AND REFERENCES
(ahead of workshop)

1. Video by the artists about *Naked on Pluto*, 5 minutes:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHGk4IC5aXk. Optionally, please have a look also at the article about Naked on Pluto on
https://monoskop.org/images/a/a1/Naked_on_Pluto_2011_Funware.pdf (pages 232-237).

2. An article about using publishing platform (MediaWiki) inside a museum to document art installations, free access: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00393630.2019.1603921

3. An article about research-based artworks giving a useful and critical historically informed overview: https://transversal.at/transversal/0311/steyerl/en