

In terms of political cinema, the different strategies that are developed by Vertov and Hitchcock refer to the problem that is identified by John Roberts in *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (unpublished, forthcoming 2015) as cultural production that either seeks to escape art into politics, or escape politics into art. While Rancière finds a brilliant means to settle this problem in the first chapter (which I will not give away), he is elsewhere less convincing, resolving theoretical issues through what Badiou refers to in *Logic of Worlds* (2009) as the democratic materialism of languages and bodies. This is made explicit as a problematic in Rancière's treatment of Roberto Rossellini's film portraits of René Descartes and Blaise Pascal, for which the filmmaker finds ways to materialize the ideas of a philosopher in his comportment, in his visible relation to his peers, and in the documentary attention paid to his material surroundings. The body, for Rancière, is a privileged vehicle of cinematic visibility. Cinema, unlike other art forms, is "bound to the visibility of speaking bodies" (108). Something as powerful as the idea of communism, for instance, and as treated in the work of Jean-Marie Straub, does not go much further in cinema than images and words, today presented in the film work of Khalil Joreige, Joana Hadjithomas, Pedro Costa, Tariq Teguia, and Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche as stories of spaces,

moving bodies, and the "imperatives of exactness" (125). The result is not just an image, to reverse what Jean-Luc Godard once said, but a *just* image. Still, this image does not serve political ends but, rather, the political forms that are staged through the means by which films arrange bodies, gazes, and locations. Such a materialism without ideology is certainly not the sort of theory we would impart to a Marxist thinker, and would likely be of little use to engaged filmmakers, even if Rancière and such artists share the same universe of forms. Cinema, Rancière concludes, "should consent to being merely the surface on which the experience of those relegated to the margins of economic circuits and social pathways seeks to be ciphered in new forms" (142). Rancière echoes Badiou when he argues that art "exists only as an unstable frontier" (6), but in this he is at times both too limiting and too inclusive. While he very rightly takes film criticism beyond a phenomenology of what the French call *mise en scène*, a word that comprises staging, direction, and production, he is unable to fathom the avant-garde project in cinema and criticism as a renewable program.

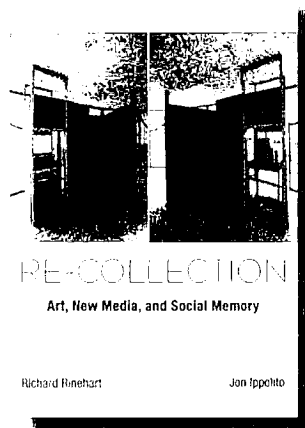
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Re-Collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory

By Richard Rinehart and Jon Ippolito

The MIT Press, 2014

297 pp./\$35.00 (hb)



Richard Rinehart and Jon Ippolito begin their comprehensive guide to the problems and possibilities inherent to preserving, collecting, and archiving the art of the digital age by framing the situation as a vitally important historical crisis. If we do not rescue our cutting-edge creative work from the digital dustbins of history, they argue, we risk losing any record of the cultural work of our era. The crisis as they describe it is so dire that their apocalyptic language does not seem out of place: "All will be lost unless we uncover the under-

lying causes of today's cultural destruction before it's too late" (7). By framing preservation as a social practice, the authors highlight the relationship between memory and power, and argue that the stakes of theorizing, strategizing, and troubleshooting the disintegration and disappearance of vast archives of creative work are critically political.

Re-Collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory is a hybrid manifesto, DIY tool resource, and academic case study that matches

its apocalyptic predictions with wit, humor, and materially valuable resources. As Ippolito and Rinehart describe it, the book works at three levels. First, it defines, contextualizes, and maps the field of "social memory" while discussing the ways that it is in crisis. Second, it uses the preservation of new media art as a case study for discussing both social memory and this crisis. And, third, it provides "tangible and tractable" examples, primarily in the form of anecdotes about the authors' experiences interacting with the case study materials, for the synthesis of the issues of preservation and social memory (13).

Central to the authors' argument is the set of techniques they offer for rescuing new media art. By embracing new modes of storage, emulation, migration, and reinterpretation, they say, "society—meaning you, the reader—can reclaim new media culture from oblivion" (8). When dealing with obsolescence, they argue, the ability to recreate, redefine, and recollect is best managed by embracing fluidity and variability. Variable media's emphasis on spreadability and collectivity is evident in the book's sections on technology, institutions, and law. The section on technology offers a history of new media art, an argument against medium-specific preservation approaches, and provocative suggestions for enlivening metadata practices. The institution section discusses the limitations of current preservation strategies while offering concrete models for preservation based on crowd-sourced video game preservation and the idea of the "open museum." Issues of copyright, originality, and authenticity underpin the section on law, which evaluates and promotes new, organic techniques for generating future-embracing preservation practices.

The book demonstrates that inclusivity, collaboration, and flexibility are the most useful modes for approaching and dealing with the crisis of history brought on by the vulnerability of the digital age. Its ideas are pragmatic and accessible. The text itself is structured as a

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conversation. Rinehart and Ippolito wrote the chapters both separately and together. In a move that could have been gimmicky if not handled so deftly, the chapters include small text boxes of conversation that perform a lively interlocution between the authors. The authors' ability to sustain a playful and inventive mode while discussing a crisis with legitimately high stakes is persuasive and suggests that their generative approach to exchanging ideas is transferrable to the practice of preservation.

The conclusion offers "Twelve Steps to Future-Proofing Contemporary Culture," each of which is accompanied by a witty icon that uses emoji-like characters to dramatize the action they describe, such as a floppy disc followed by an arrow pointing toward a museum structure. The steps offer concrete suggestions to curators, conservators, archivists, collection managers, institutions, programmers, lawyers, creators, dealers, sponsors, academics, and historians, and encourage interactivity, variability, and community building. Rinehart and Ippolito provide pragmatic

Savage Preservation: The Ethnographic Origins of Modern Media Technology

By Brian Hochman/University of Minnesota Press/2014/312 pp./\$82.50 (hb), \$27.50 (sb)



American anthropological practice during the heyday of the "vanishing race" myth was characterized by tension between the aspiration to scientific objectivity and the ineluctable cultural situation of the ethnographer. Just as important was the pressure to naturalize genocide during the intensifying colonization of North America in the nineteenth century. "Salvage" ethnography (premised upon the historical subordination of cultures predicted to "vanish" due to inferiority) offered a paradoxical foundation to the discipline of anthropology: its erstwhile duty

to impartially record cultures it would also help consign to historical oblivion. Brian Hochman's interdisciplinary book attends to the interwoven production of ethnography and media technologies during classical modernity, rejecting hegemonic understandings of documentary in favor of "an evolving orientation toward writing and audiovisual technologies themselves" (xix).

This type of reflexivity has been especially audible in American anthropology since the 1980s' "crisis of ethnography," but Hochman takes a fresher route by following Wolfgang Ernst's proposal of media archaeology "as an epistemologically alternative approach to the supremacy of media-historical narratives."¹ At the intersection of such

instructions to help us preserve our collected works. Their grassroots-oriented, no-nonsense guidelines urge people—whether they be creators, curators, or users—to invest in strategies for reimagining, remixing, and reinvention. In the end, their anxiety over loss is translated into an image of the future that is invigorating and exciting:

Perhaps the cultural heritage institutions that succeed in preserving our digital heritage will not look like entomology cases, where the butterflies of culture are pinned to the walls, fixed and motionless in their one true form for eternity. Instead, they may look like butterfly huts at the zoo, where they will breed successive generations of living culture that float about, flutter, and delight us (233).

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narratives with the salvage ethnographic project, Hochman reveals the racializing motivations behind the development of modern media technologies. Countering the teleology of much media history, this study confronts the racial hierarchies embedded in epochal thinking still popular in today's "digital age."

The racism of salvage ethnography is often addressed only obliquely—recast, in suspect celebration, as the backdrop to Boasian relativism or the presumed enlightenment of deconstructionist mistrust of the culture concept. Engaging and well organized, *Savage Preservation* is a constructive elaboration of the racial charge of media history, yet occasionally careless phrasing and punctuation may inadvertently reinforce, for the ungenerous or novice reader, the very prejudicial thinking that Hochman aims to critique.

The notion that attention to the physicality of media can lend nuance to the study of imperialism's project of cultural data capture—whether under the rubric of salvage or not—is not itself a surprise, but the case histories Hochman presents are a useful reference. Especially incisive is his chapter on *Moana: A Romance of the Golden Age* (1926, directed by Robert Flaherty and Frances Hubbard Flaherty), which reframes the film's legacy in terms of the racist visual pleasure that undergirded pre-color film experimentation. Similarly, his treatment of the ethnographic desire for material permanence and cultural "sense data" in the case of the early phonograph persuasively suggests the profundity of ethnocentrism and racist perceptions that has permeated media innovation. All in all, the book's intersection of technological development and evolutionist cultural theory make a valuable contribution to media history.

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NOTE 1. Wolfgang Ernst, "Media Archaeology: Method and Machine versus History and Narrative of Media," in *Digital Memory and the Archive*, ed. Jussi Parikka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 55.