

The Progressive Dinner Party Restored

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Question

How can a collection of born-digital literature be recompiled and migrated to modern platforms, while maintaining the original aesthetic and ensuring open accessibility?

Description

The Progressive Dinner Party Restored is a project I have undertaken to restore a collection of 39 born-digital works created by international female E-Lit artists. It was funded by the WSU Undergraduate Summer Mini-Grant from the College of Art and Sciences in 2019. The original website contained external links to the works featured in the collection, the majority of which broke since the site's creation in the late 1990s. Additionally, the software these works relied on (such as Adobe Flash, Shockwave, and Java Applets) have or will become obsolete. My task was to update and preserve the collection for continued access, study, and enjoyment for all.

Methodology

The 39 works featured in the collection were all unique, meaning that each required use of a different methodology for restoring it. I used preexisting methodologies that have been adapted by the Electronic Literature Lab to be suitable for digital preservation practices. I then applied these methodologies in a way that would be relevant for managing large collections of unique works.

Platform Studies

I analyzed works through the Wayback Machine to understand their original context on the web, then translated them to .WARC files through the Webrecorder.

Action Research

I created a replicable process for both local and external files. Local files required the WARCIT command line tool, while external files involved a manual crawl.

Textual Studies

I checked each work against the original to determine if anything was missing or altered.

Code Studies

I analyzed the code of each work, in order to strategize the steps I needed to take for preserving them.

Feminist Methodologies

The collection focused on women in E-Lit, and I had the opportunity to amplify their achievements by preserving and disseminating them.

Archival Research

I went through physical archives within the lab and digital archives on the web to gain additional context regarding the works.

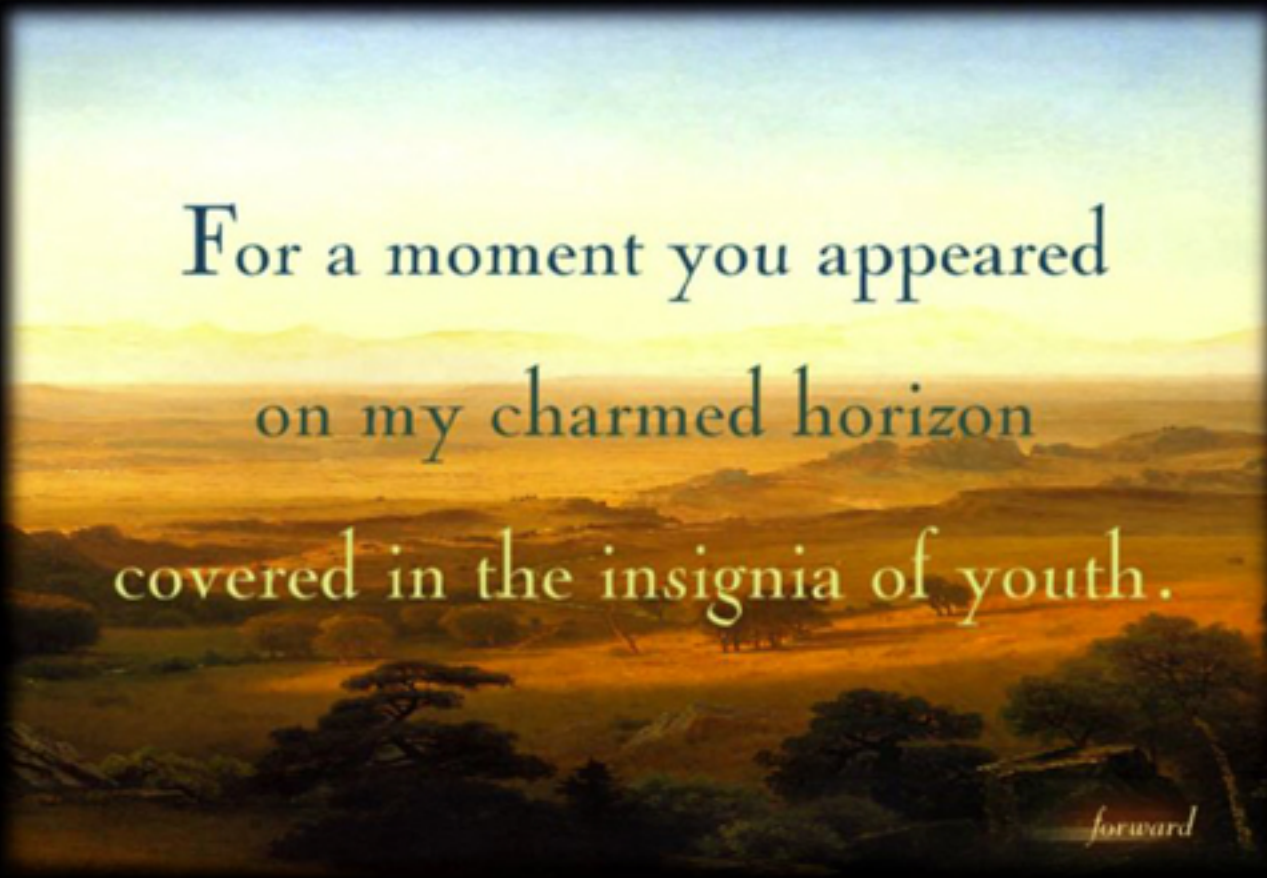
Translation Studies

I maintained the original aesthetic of the collection and the website it was housed in, going back to the original for reference.

Findings

I applied combinations of methodologies appropriate to each work. After four months of closely examining the code of each piece featured, I compiled a list of findings that can be referenced by other researchers hoping to undertake similar projects.

1. Rhizome's **Webrecorder** tool is an excellent resource for converting works to Web Archive (.WARC) files, a format used to store web crawls. This format ensures the longevity and ongoing support among browsers.
2. Directly uploading files to the Webrecorder ensured a complete crawl of the work and increased efficiency.
3. Code displayed in outdated encoding formats could not be displayed by the Webrecorder.
4. The Webrecorder does not currently emulate **Adobe Shockwave** files, though some browsers (such as Pale Moon) provide the necessary plugins to view these.
5. The **Wayback Machine** was a helpful tool for locating external files.
6. There were not as many **Adobe Flash** or Shockwave files as initially anticipated. The majority of artists during that period seemed to favor HTML and CSS.
7. There were some technological choices that were consistent among many of the works, such as frames, gifs, a lack of naming conventions for web pages, and the capitalization of HTML tags in code. Such issues speak of the time period, revealing common practice in the late 90s.
8. The project is still relevant today, as artists and others interested in E-Lit responded to the project with high enthusiasm.
9. Though **The Progressive Dinner Party** is an international collection of works, not many people of color were involved due to the unequal distribution and accessibility of computer technology during the 90s.



Project Deliverables

The restored site

<https://elo-repository.org/progressive-dinner-party/index.htm>

Published, multimedia book created in the Scalar platform

<https://scalar.usc.edu/works/the-progressive-dinner-party-restored/index>

LiveStream Research Presentation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqyfvNtUH94>

Video Documentary

Created by Moneca Roath

<https://vimeo.com/361899790>

