

National Forum on Ethics in Web Archiving

Rhizome, in collaboration with the University of California at Riverside Library (UCR), the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH), and the Documenting the Now project, requests \$100,000 from the IMLS National Leadership Grants for Libraries program to host a three-day national forum that will focus on addressing the ethical challenges, both technical and social. Following the forum, a best practices white paper and proceedings will be published.

National Need

The dramatic rise in the public's use of web and social media platforms to document events of historical significance presents archivists with a tremendous opportunity to transform appraisal, collecting, preservation, and discovery of this new type of research resource. Over the past twenty years, web archiving technology has improved extensively. From the early 1990s with the pioneering Internet Archive and their Wayback Machine, to newer tools such as Rhizome's Webrecorder system, web archiving and the technical expertise around developing and improving tools have allowed for better high-fidelity archives of the personalized, dynamic web. But while the promise of web data collections is enormous for archives and the scholarly community, the privacy and safety risks to public users of these platforms are significant and have not been given adequate attention in the archives profession. These issues are exacerbated by gaps in web and social media platform literacy; widespread use of the web for public shaming and other kinds of abuse; and increased opportunities for surveillance, especially for individuals taking part in public displays of civil disobedience.

Over the past year, the Mellon Foundation-funded Documenting the Now project (DocNow) has been addressing some of the issues surrounding best practices in collecting and preserving social media for public archives, focusing in particular on social media activism. Issues that have arisen include requests by law enforcement agencies for access to Twitter archives, and republication of social media posts by news media without a user's consent. Rhizome has also been exploring similar questions through Webrecorder and its other digital preservation initiatives. The field of sociology offers important concepts that will also be drawn into this project, such as the critical-realist framework offered by "Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics" (Townsend and Wallace, 2016). National Forum on Ethics in Web Archiving will be an ideal opportunity to bring this research into dialogue, connecting it with the archives field as well as a wider, interdisciplinary group of professionals and community members to discuss and develop technical solutions and best practices for collecting social media and web data. It will foster a deep understanding of these ethical landmines and a commitment to non-oppressive content collection, while emphasizing the richness that social media can bring to our understanding of the now.

This forum aligns with the IMLS National Digital Platform key goals of "Championing Diversity and Inclusion," "Engaging Communities," and "Enabling Technology," as they are described in the 2015 IMLS Impact Report on the National Digital Platform.

Project Design

This project will take place from October 1, 2017 to September 30, 2018. It will be co-organized by Rhizome and DocNow, under the leadership of Project Director Michael Connor.

Co-organizers and an advisory committee will convene via conference call in October 2017 to identify potential guests and set panel topics. Advisors will include Kate Crawford of Microsoft Research, Jefferson Bailey from the Internet Archive, Nicholas Taylor at Stanford University and the International Internet Preservation Coalition, and others. Invited guests will include speakers from a range of professional fields—artists, legal experts, activists, user experience and web designers, archivists, scholars, software developers, and librarians. Invited speakers could include Steven Fullwood, Associate Curator at the NYPL's Schomburg Center; Jarrett Drake, Digital Archivist at Princeton; Jane Anderson, legal expert on copyright, fair use, and indigenous cultures; Meredith Whitaker, data scientist at Google; Zeynep Tufekci, sociologist and associate

professor at UNC-Chapel Hill; and members of the advisory board, such as Jefferson Bailey from the Internet Archive.

In November 2017, invitations will be sent to invited speakers. A microsite and open call will be published as well, inviting archivists to apply for funded participation, especially those working without institutional support. This will follow the model of Rhizome's successful Internet Art Microgrants program, and leverage the extensive professional and social media networks established by Documenting the Now, Rhizome, and the New Museum to solicit applications. Submissions will be reviewed and responses issued in early December 2017.

A three-day forum will take place in April 2018 at the New Museum in New York City. It will include traditional panels and keynotes as well as unconference sessions and a design workshop on ethical data archiving tools. Following the event, Rhizome will produce a publication of proceedings and a white paper with recommendations for ethical web and social media archiving to be published in September 2018.

Performance Goals and Outcomes

- 1) Connect archival practitioners from interdisciplinary backgrounds who share a concern about ethics in web and social media archiving for a conference with 150 attendees and 5,000 livestream views.
- 2) Bring together knowledge from disparate fields about ethical pitfalls and best practices in web archiving in a white paper that will be used by librarians, scholarly researchers, community archivists, and developers to inform technical and methodological approaches to web archiving.
- 3) Distribute the white paper to users of web archiving software Archive-It and Webrecorder; promote it through existing networks such as NYARC and NDSR, and summarize it for public consumption on Rhizome's blog. Leverage the professional networks of the advisory board to distribute the paper in the social media research field as well.

National Impact

The key outcome of this project will be to allow libraries and archives of varying scale to make better-informed decisions about when and how to archive user-generated content online. Thus, the national forum will allow more individuals and organizations to take advantage of the unique opportunities presented by web and social media archiving—keeping users safe, and laying the groundwork for richer, deeper, and more ethical web archives in the future.

Project Team

Michael Connor (Project Director) – Artistic Director Rhizome

Aria Dean – Assistant Curator, Rhizome

Alexandra Dolan-Mescal, User Experience Designer, DocNow

Dragan Espenschied – Preservation Director, Rhizome

Bergis Jules – University & Political Papers Archivist at UC Riverside; Community Lead, DocNow

Ilya Kreymer – Lead Developer, Rhizome and founder of Webrecorder

Kaela Noel – Editorial Manager, Rhizome

Ed Summers – Lead Developer, Maryland Institute for Technology; Technical Lead, DocNow

Estimated Budget

Rhizome requests \$100,000 for the three-day symposium. An additional \$8,000 of support will come from the Knight Foundation to cover cost for hospitality and event production, and in-kind support of \$18,000 will come from Rhizome and the New Museum towards staffing, marketing and PR, and usage of the venue. Funding from IMLS will support travel, lodging, and fees for speakers (25%), travel and lodging for funded participants (25%), livestream and event costs not covered by in-kind support or Knight Foundation support (9%), additional staff costs for Rhizome and Documenting the Now (20%), website and marketing costs not covered by in-kind support (6%), and publication costs (15%).