

## “From Data Preserves to Dépense without Reserve”

Although collaborations like the End of Term Harvest <<http://eotarchive.cdlib.org/>> have already started preserving government websites from the vicissitudes of administration change, we might want to revisit the question of digital memory and digital archives in general. Not only do we need archives, but archives also need us. On this issue, two books (among many others) to consider:

Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive*

<<https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/digital-memory-and-the-archive>>

Abby Smith Rumsey, *When We Are No More: How Digital Memory is Shaping Our Future*

<<http://www.bloomsbury.com/us/when-we-are-no-more-9781620408025/>>

The perils of digital memory intersect with the question of the anthropocene as environmental data—climate change data at NASA and EPA data among others—appear to be at risk in the transition to a new governmental administration. On the one hand, we have—just this afternoon—websites newly “archived” in the sense of deleted:

<<http://motherboard.vice.com/read/all-references-to-climate-change-have-been-deleted-from-the-white-house-website>>. And, on the other, websites newly archived in the sense of

“transitioned”: <<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2017/01/17/obama-administration-digital-transition-moving-forward>>. If digital archives once had the role of preserving analogue materials and born-digital materials, now these same archives are at risk. In particular, climate-

change data and digital archives connected to the environment need their own refuge. In 2017, we must not only rally for nature reserves and nature preserves; we must also consider the question of “Data Reserves” and “Data Preserves.”

Last month, Professors Michelle Murphy and Patrick Keilty organized a data rescue event at the University of Toronto called “Guerilla Archiving: Saving Environmental Data from Trump,” during which data entities were captured, sorted, and seeded to *The Internet Archive*

<<https://archive.org/>>.

In partnership with the Environmental Data & Governance Initiative

<<https://envirodatagov.org/>>, the University of Pennsylvania also hosted a data rescue event

(“DataRescuePhilly”), which included an environmental justice teach-in on DataRefuge

<<https://www.datarefuge.org/>>, a refuge for vulnerable environmental data, a creative coding

and archive-a-thon (downloading and uploading datasets, feeding and seeding DataRefuge), and finally a walk through the “archive-as-mobile-installation” “Date/um,” which explored the Schuylkill River as archive, a fluvial archive and digital river.

DataRescueIndy says it plans to “rescue climate and environmental data stored on government servers: they need to be stored elsewhere to ensure continued open access.”

DataRescueChicago says it will “identify, back-up, and help to preserve at-risk climate and environmental data resources before they are suppressed from public view and use.”

DataRescueUCLA, another climate data protection event, calls on “allies in data collection and archiving” to “proactively archive public environmental data”

<<http://www.climatedataprotection.net/>>

Despite the leadership of these important initiatives, the recent article “Down with data! Sagas are more likely to save earth” suggests that we need more stories not more data to deal with

various planetary and environmental crises. Likewise, “Environmental Data, Guerilla Archiving, and the Trump Transition,” cautions: “One might argue that the #DataRescue project is a defensive effort meant to prop up the status quo, namely, the prominent role of data in neoliberal environmental governance.” Although it might be important to question the fetishization of data, the recent announcement that the new administration plans to cut the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities signals that the arts and humanities are at risk as well as “data.” And, we should not assume that environmental data are the only data at risk: new media archives, digital art archives, and perhaps any archive with a transgressive or progressive character might be in jeopardy from repressive strategies of all sorts, from defunding to deletion. Just as the environmental “data at risk” anxiety seems to be materializing within one hour of the inauguration <<https://techcrunch.com/2017/01/20/the-official-white-house-website-has-dropped-any-mention-of-climate-change/>> so too is there no time to lose to protect arts and humanities archives.

The University of California has an extensive Nature Reserve system; it is now perhaps time for a Data Preserve System. Just as environmental activists urge us to save species that are on the edge of extinction, so too must we save or preserve archives: digital archives matter. Yet, there are many different ways to hack the archive. Artists and experimental media people have their own way of saving data: experimental art and new media projects are the favored mode of The Media Ecology Lab. In February, we will hold a workshop on nature preserves and data preserves: “Data Preserves: Digital Conservation and Earth Ecologies.”

<<https://www.facebook.com/MediaEcologyLab/>>

<<http://www.ucnrs.org/reserves/steeleburnand-anza-borrego-desert-research-center.html>>

The idea for The Media Ecology Lab was sparked several years ago when UC Irvine acquired some reserve property in the Anza Borrego desert. The idea was simple: environmental biologists and social ecologists are not the only stakeholders with regard to so-called natural reserve systems. Arts and humanities affiliates theorize and deploy critical practices when it comes to questions concerning the anthropocene and our planet's hybrid techno-vivaria. During winter semester 2014 at Cornell University, students from my “Media Ecology and the Anthropocene” seminar helped map out (from their snowy vantage) a vision for The Lab:

<<https://www.facebook.com/Media-Ecology-and-the-Anthropocene-224318881064683/>>

During summers 2014 and 2015, the seminar was revamped for students at UC Irvine as “Media Ecologies of the Anthropocene.” I taught this class remotely: some weeks from Ithaca NY and some weeks from California’s Anza Borrego desert. Although students were interested in the possibility of visiting the sublime desert research center, they were even more enthusiastic about the possibilities of experimenting with webcams, remotely controlled robotic apparatuses, and other internetworked technologies, along the lines of these notable projects:

*Telegarden*: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gbyy5vSg8w8>>

*Silent Barrage*: <<http://silentbarrage.com/>>

The Media Ecology Lab is a place in the Anza Borrego desert, but it is also a place in what Jean Baudrillard, a long time ago, called “the desert of the real.” The Lab hopes to navigate these two deserts with wayfarers from the arts, humanities, and science and technology studies. This February we will be setting up our first sound ecology project at the desert research center: sound feed from the desert basin floor and the rocky crags will be piped to Cornell's Lab of Ornithology

for spectrographic analysis. If anyone is interested in visiting during this time (or for inquiries about future media ecology experiments and retreats), please contact me at:

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Regards,  
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