



Electronic Literature Lab

Code of Ethics

At the heart of the Electronic Literature Lab's mission is care for human expression and the human experience. Through curation, documentation, preservation, conservation, and production of born-digital art, literature, and video games, we strive to embody the following values. These principles guide our work and our relationships with creators, collaborators, the public, and each other.

Our Values

Responsible Stewardship

Archival materials provide digital and physical remnants of human memory and cultural history. As caretakers of these remnants, we act as stewards of our heritage and collective memory. It is with great care and respect that we accept this privilege and responsibility.

Maintaining Trustworthiness and Integrity

Our reputation as an academic resource and scholarly organization is one that is upheld by our commitment to trustworthiness and integrity. The relationships we maintain with artists, researchers, institutions, donors, and our community are strengthened by the promises we keep.

Service to Humanity

While our work is intrinsically connected to technology, our focus remains first on humanity. We believe our duty to the public extends to all people. While we respect and celebrate technology's role in our work, it is the preservation of human memory and human expression at the forefront of our mission.

Collaboration and Reciprocity

This work cannot be done alone. As members of a larger community, we strengthen archival and preservation efforts when we work together. We believe that sharing our work, collaborating with others, and participating in greater academic discussions makes us more effective archivists.



Responsible Stewardship

We strive to preserve the most fragile works first. Works published on outmoded physical media, like floppy disks and CD-ROMs, are especially in danger of disappearing. This means when possible, we archive and preserve our most vulnerable materials first.

We use preservation methods that ensure both the integrity of the work and its long-term accessibility. When reconstructing a work originally created with Flash, for example, we reconstruct it with Ruffle and Conifer rather than in open web languages since the emulations of the Flash Players and a functional browser, respectively, offer a closer proximity of the work's functionality than a version created with HTML, CSS, and JavaScript.

We document works we cannot conserve. There are times we cannot conserve a work, either for copyright or technological reasons. In those cases, we document the work as completely as possible through metadata, image capture, and through the Pathfinders methodology developed by Dene Grigar and Stuart Moulthrop.

We respect previous versions, particularly those established as authoritative. The lab restores and reconstructs not to replace, but to maintain our cultural heritage. When reconstructing *Figurski at Findhorn on Acid*, for example, we opted to provide users with a visual experience similar to the original Storyspace environment. However, we acknowledge that it cannot replace the authoritative edition published in 2001.

We build a structure that allows for future restorations and reconstructions. Projects are shared via GitHub, for example. Build notes are maintained so that the next team of preservationists are aware of the steps taken to arrive at the version they are about to preserve or reconstruct. An archive of the media files is held so

that they can also be shared with others. We understand that whatever work we undertake on behalf of a work is temporary and that in some future time will need to be preserved again.

We share and save multiple copies of whatever we restore and reconstruct. We maintain several copies and keep numerous back-ups of digital materials. They are held on both physical and cloud storage as well as in redundant locations. We acknowledge the fragility of the materials and our responsibility to keep them safe.

We maintain detailed records of all preservation decisions, methods used, and personnel involved. Preservation is an iterative process, and we understand that decisions we make now may be flawed or imperfect. By documenting what we did and why, we create a record that future preservationists can build upon, learn from, or revise. This transparency is essential.

We regularly assess digital storage systems and migrate files as formats become obsolete, while always maintaining an archive of the original files. Technology changes rapidly and the storage formats that are standard today will not be the same in the future. We monitor our systems and migrate materials when necessary. At the same time, we never discard original files.

We acknowledge the limitations of our resources and communicate openly when works fall outside our capacity. We cannot preserve everything. When a work exceeds our technical capabilities, funding, or expertise, we are up front about those limitations.

We train staff in current best practices and update methods as the field and technology evolve. Digital preservation is a relatively young and rapidly changing

field. We are committed to the ongoing education of our team and are open to new and emerging approaches, tools, and standards.

We plan for institutional continuity so that preserved works remain accessible beyond any individual's tenure. While the lab was founded and established by Dene Grigar, we have built systems, documentation, and relationships that ensure our work outlasts any single person. This also applies to the expertise of our staff and researchers, whose work is diligently documented for future teams.

text
of cyberfiction

10 Astor Place, Suite 2409 New York, NY 10003

Oct 15, 1988

Buddy Newkirk
46 St. Claire Ave
Pirate Cove, RI

Buddy—

Here are the page proofs of "Tree." I think the illustration goes real well & hope it's okay w/ you. A few questions indicated - if you could get these back to us by mid November, that would

Maintaining Integrity and Trustworthiness



We respect the privacy, identity, and ownership rights of creators. The works we preserve belong to the people who made them. We do not share personal information or act against a creator's wishes without clear justification. For example, when developing an exhibition on Women in E-Lit, if an artist requests her work not be included in the exhibition, we respect that request.

We honor contracts and agreements. When we make commitments to artists, institutions, funders, or collaborators, we keep them. Those commitments are the foundation of the trust that others place in us.

We distinguish clearly between original materials and reconstructed or restored elements. In order for the public, our partners, and institutions to be able to trust our work, we must always disclose what they are viewing. When we reconstruct or restore a work, we make clear what is original and what has been changed.

We disclose the methodologies and principles behind our decision-making. There is no perfect method of preservation, something is always lost or altered after undergoing migration or translation. We document how and why we arrived at our choices so that others can evaluate, critique, or build upon our work.

We do not misrepresent the provenance, authorship, or history of materials. Accuracy matters. We will not exaggerate, obscure, or fabricate the origins or history of the works we hold.

We apply our policies consistently regardless of the status or influence of those involved. A work by a well-known artist will receive the same care and scrutiny as one by a lesser-known creator. No work, artist, or institution will be exempt from our standards due to significance.

We correct errors transparently. We will make mistakes throughout this process. We are committed to being forthcoming, open, and transparent about those errors and disclose, correct, and rectify the mistake promptly.

We safeguard materials and information that are entrusted to us. The work and history entrusted to us will be treated with the utmost care. Artists, donors, and collaborators trust us with their work and, sometimes, with sensitive information. We protect all of these assets equally. We also maintain safe physical spaces for our archives and use archival quality materials whenever possible.

We honor the prior scholarship that informs our work. Our methods, frameworks, and understanding have been shaped by the scholars and educators that came before us. We engage with their ideas and recognize that our work is a part of an ongoing conservation.

We disclose funding sources, institutional affiliation, and potential conflicts of interest. Transparency is not limited to only our work, but also how that work is being funded, supported, and disseminated.



Service to Humanity

We aim for both a contemporary audience and some undetermined future generation of readers and players that we cannot begin to define. We preserve this history not just for today's society, but for the society decades or even centuries in the future. We collect and preserve all we can with the best tools available to us. In this way, the lab can ensure the works we preserve are available now but are also able to survive long enough to resonate with someone in a distant future time.

We do not play gatekeepers. Works are disappearing faster than we can save them. If we are also arguing about which works are worthy of saving, we lose more. Instead, we acknowledge that multiple interpretations of a work can exist and they are all worthy of preservation.

We advocate for the cultural and historical value of the works we preserve. Born-digital art, literature, and games are significant cultural artifacts. We make the case for their importance to funders, institutions, and the public.

We balance scholarly needs with approachability for non-academic audiences. We acknowledge that we serve many communities, both academic and non-academic. We are committed to meeting the needs of both, ensuring that our work is accessible and useful to the field as well as the public.

We publish research through open-access channels when possible in order to maximize reach and minimize barriers. Scholarship locked behind paywalls serves fewer people. When we are able to publish openly, we do. For example, materials in The NEXT are freely available online without institutional affiliation or specialized technology required. Avoiding a propriety platform ensures that we are minimizing as many barriers to access as possible.

We are committed to accessibility and developing practices to better serve all users. ELL is committed to practices that address the gaps in access for users, including people with disabilities and sensory sensitivities. For example, the lab developed the Extended eLectronic Metadata Schema (ELMS) that directly addresses some of the potential needs of these communities by providing more robust information about the work experience so users are better able to engage with it.

We mentor emerging scholars and practitioners in the field. The progress and effort made by our work is only meaningful if it lasts. New artists, researchers, practitioners, and community members are what will carry this history on. We invest time and care in supporting students and early-career professionals through education, opportunity, and community.

We contribute to public understanding of digital preservation, digital humanities, and related disciplines. Born-digital art, literature, and games have impact on our greater society. We engage with broader audiences and never limit our outreach to a single field, perspective, or sector.



Collaboration and Reciprocity

We consult with the work's artist and other stakeholders when possible about the parameters and vision for preservation, restoration, or reconstruction. Our work is more accurate and robust when we are able to consult directly with the original creators. We treat the ability to consult with these primary sources directly as a great privilege in our research. In all possible cases, the lab prioritizes the voice and vision of the original creator.

We acknowledge the labor and expertise of all involved, including student researchers, volunteers, and community members. We name everyone who contributes to any project, no matter how small the role or what kind of project. We acknowledge and value the work, individual contributions, and perspectives of all involved.

We share knowledge, tools, and methods with partner institutions and scholars. What we learn through our work belongs to the field, not to us alone. We share and collaborate openly so that everyone can benefit from and build upon our work.

We seek diverse perspectives when developing policies and making significant decisions. Our judgement improves when it is challenged by perspectives that differ from our own. Even when decision-making responsibility lies with a single person, we are committed to making collaborative and community-minded decisions.

We participate in broader networks and contribute to the shared standards of the field. We are a part of a larger community of practitioners and scholars. We engage with our community so that we are better able to contribute to the development of standards, make partnerships, and learn from both emerging and existing scholarship. We believe the sum is greater than its parts.