Presented at the Electronic Media Group Session, AIC 39th Annual Meeting, May 31–June 1, 2011, Philadelphia, PA.

THE TREE DECISION-MAKING MODEL FOR THE PRESERVATION OF TECHNOLOGICAL EQUIPMENT FOR TIME-BASED MEDIA ART: A DOCAM RESEARCH TOOL OUTCOME

RICHARD GAGNIER

ABSTRACT

For the past five years, the DOCAM Research Alliance (Documentation and Conservation of the Media Arts Heritage) has been looking at issues of preservation and documentation of time–based media artworks. Initiated by The Foundation Daniel Langlois, under the leadership of Jean Gagnon and Alain Depocas, this large research endeavor has been financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada as part of the Community-University Research Alliances program. The mission of the DOCAM Research Alliance has been to identify and implement five research axes and propose tools, guides, and methods that contribute to the preservation of media arts heritage. The axes are conservation, documentation, cataloguing, history of technologies, and terminology. For each of these axes a research committee was created where the case study approach was mostly adopted.

Reflecting on the knowledge acquired through this approach, the DOCAM Research Committee on Conservation managed to examine and refine the meaning of some principles and concepts that are becoming quite specific to the preservation issues of time-based media works, with obsolescence being a key issue in this discussion. For these works, authenticity as a concept could be articulated as an active paradigm by defining the work's integrity to be maintained. Attempts to keep in mind the historical setting and significance of an artwork is not solely located within the maintenance of its original media technology. From these concepts, a sequential decision tree model has emerged as an aid in the formulation of preservation strategies for works incorporating time-based technology. This model takes into account three values proposed by Pip Laurenson of Tate, London: the historical, conceptual, and aesthetic values. By reflecting on their importance and significance in regard to the equipment, technology, or both, that are being experienced as the true nature of the work, one could make informed decisions in regards to preservation issues yet pondering these values within the prescriptions of the work's presentation, where the technological equipment being incorporated while on or not on view, would influence such decisions upon its integrity.

This decision tree model, based on usage of a simple, open source program, is not a prescriptive tool but rather an unfolding logical thinking aid that came out of the methodology and observations that the different case studies led the research team to formulate. Two case studies from the contemporary collection of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts will illustrate its application.

Richard Gagnier
Head of Conservation
Montreal Museum Of Fine Arts
Montreal, Québec
Canada
rgagnier@mbamtl.org

Papers presented in *The Electronic Media Review* have not undergone peer review.