

PRESERVING DIGITAL PUBLIC TELEVISION
Notes from Television Writers Focus Group

Held on Thursday, May 26, 2005

Time: 9:00-10:30 am

Participants:

Frazier Moore, Associated Press
Matt Rausch, TV Guide
Dan Ocheba, Millimeter & System Magazine

Hosts:

Nan Rubin, NDIIPP Project Coordinator (NR)
Daisy Pommer, Archivist, Thirteen/WNET (DP)
Winter Shanck, Assistant Librarian, Thirteen/WNET (WS)
Tanisha Jones, NYU Graduate of MIAP (TJ)
Pamela Smith, NYU Graduate of MIAP (PS)

Overview

Nan Rubin began the focus group by giving the television writers an overview of the NDIIPP project funded by the Library of Congress (LoC). Daisy followed up by giving an overview of the production process at Thirteen/WNET.

The television writers were shown raw footage shot from the weekly newsmagazine *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* for a special on Pope John Paul II and the mini-series *Broadway: The American Musical*. They also watched the final broadcast segment of *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, a clip from the *Broadway* DVD extra, *The Making of Wicked*, as well as a CD of digitized photos and the mini-series website.

This report summarizes issues discussed under general subject areas and is not verbatim transcript. The major points made in the discussions that followed the viewing of the segments are listed below:

Major Comments

- All originally shot raw materials has potential value.
- Materials that are not properly cataloged are infinitely useless.
- Design and implement policies at the beginning of the production process that allows producers to have a say in what is important for preservation.
- The singularity of the material should be used as a part of the process of determining whether the material is preserved. It is better to err on the side of preservation and access when the singularity of the materials is questionable
- Implement a system of basic cataloging during the process of producing the program.
- The raw material has little value for television writers because the nature of the field is to comment on what is broadcast for public consumption.
- Access to materials can be through LoC and the originating institution.
- The finished product can act as a catalog to available materials.
- The materials that should be preserved are the ones that allow complete access.

Discussion prior to viewing materials

- In preserving the produced materials, the question is whether to accept materials for digital preservation or to deal with material in the historical sense of preservation (FM).
- Since the cost of digital storage has steadily dropped, why not save everything (MR)? The materials have to be organized and catalogued, which is labor intensive and time consuming (NR). Materials can be infinitely useless without cataloging (MR and DO).
- There is the issue of the explosion of formats. A decision need to be made about what you want to keep and get rid of the rest (DO).
- Dan made a valid point to definitely keep materials that are a one time creation that can be used repeatedly. He pointed out that animation companies often re-use generic actions such as walking in several different productions, thus saving on production costs.

Discussion after viewing *Religion & Ethics* raw footage

These materials were shot on DVcam and represented materials not used in the final program.

- Potential Users:
 - Potential users are people working on a journalistic project or researching the history of the Pope John Paul and his papacy or researching the power or editing (MR).
 - This material would be useful for historians (DO).
 - This material is not useful for journalists (FM) because there is no mechanism for its use (MR). Television writers only reflect upon what is broadcast for public consumption, not the underlying materials and decision making process (FM).
- What to Preserve/Discard:
 - Save finished program with some of the underlying elements, such as the interviews. The b-roll and notes don't need to be saved (MR).
 - Preserve all versions of finished programs and raw underlying materials. All the material extremely useful because they can be learned from and used for other purposes. For example, the segment where one of the commentators voiced his own personal opinion not based on any question asked during the interview can be valuable as a stand alone clip. As per the lower third materials, such as identifiers, preservation is a low priority because they will be represented in the cataloging of the material (FM).
 - Preservation of the entire video footage is not necessary. Video logging programs shoots the head and tail of segments longer than 10 seconds as thumbnails and records all audio versions (DO).
 - Implement policies and a system at the beginning of the production process that allows the producer the authority to decide what should be preserved (DO). If producers can hand over materials that are ready to be uploaded onto a disk, then the burden can be shifted from the archival end of the process (FM). Producer may choose to err in favor of keeping everything, which is fine if it can be handed over in an organized fashion (MR).
 - Materials from news feeds and other organizations have no value in saving (FM).

- The uniqueness and singularity of the material should determine the importance of preservation, even if similar material is available at other institutions (MR).
- Cataloging and Access
 - The idea cataloging of the underlying material is labor intensive (MR).
 - Implement a system when during the process of producing a program, the producer has to catalog the underlying materials (FM). This all ready happens in an uncontrolled and inconsistent format (DO).
 - LoC intent is to keep the materials. A copy can also be keep by the originating institution (NR).
 - Materials with value added, such as the R&E interview with the speaker's additional comment, should be isolated.

Discussion after viewing *Broadway: The American Musical* raw footage

- Potential users
 - A person looking at any aspect of Broadway musical production would be interested in these materials (FM).
- What to Preserve/Discard:
 - The raw material and DVD extra material should be preserved. Always keep material that is originally produced. There is value added in the rehearsal in street clothes and costume shop footage (MR).
 - A decision would have to be made to evaluate what materials are acceptable and a series of rules would need to be developed to outline what the deliverables are to the producers (DO).
- Cataloging & Access
 - The finished product can act as a catalog to available underlying materials (FM and MR). Having the proper labels on the materials is questionable (MR).
- Website Preservation and Use
 - Website preservation is a mystery (FM). Capturing the materials and links on website is a major problem (NR).
 - The materials on the website are not very useful, but can be used as a starting point (MR).
 - A snapshot of the websites can be captured (DO). Capturing the content of the website is the problem (NR). Capturing a snapshot of the website has value because it gives the researcher a view of what was available for public consumption at a given period in time (MR).
 - Websites are secondary to other originally produced materials (DO).
- Digitized photo CDs

- Some of these materials are priceless (FM). To lose these materials would be devastating (MR). Although this is the case, the original photos are available elsewhere (DO).
- Images should be made available because of the cost associated with the production of the photo CDs barring that the rights allow this (MR).

Other Comments

- It is better to err on the side of preservation and access when the singularity of the materials is questionable. The singularity of the materials should drive what is archived (MR).
- Time and effort should be used to determine the validity of long term preservation on a case by case basis. It is not PBS' mandate to catalog material from other sources (DO).
- There is justification for project funding based on the material being available for generations to come (FM).
- There has to be vetting of materials based on merit or experience. The key is to pick important material and vet out other materials. See if another archive is willing to preserve the vetted materials (DO).
- The legal issue is the biggest consideration when determining what to keep and preserve. The materials that should be preserved are the ones that allow complete access (DO).