How Do you Catch A Cloud and Pin it Down: Preserving Digital Creativity

public talk by

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Abstract

There has been much anxiety over the last decade about the effect the increasing dependence on digital tools will have on the historical memory of this present moment. The typescripts, film negatives, and telegrams that tell the story of the theatre of a generation or two ago have been replaced by Google Docs, JPEGs, and posts on Facebook walls. The archives of 20th century theater consisting of crumbling scrapbooks, fading mimeographs, and vinegar-syndrome prone acetate negatives were anything but durable, but they at least had a materiality and legibility that could be comprehended by a researcher in the archives. Today, much of the history of theatre is stored on a variety of digital storage devices, some owned by corporations with little incentive to invest in long-term preservation. Data is often encoded in file formats readable only by very niche software maintained by small companies. Archivists, though largely aware of the urgency and magnitude of the problem, must struggle, often with annually diminishing resources, to adapt an infrastructure designed for the preservation of physical artifacts to the needs of new kinds of collections (all while continuing to care for the mountains of paper documentation produced in previous decades). Libraries and archives must figure out how to preserve these materials, but they will be best positioned to argued for resources to do so when researchers figure out how to use them. Born-digital archives are as varied as their traditional analog counterparts, and, in this talk, Doug Reside, curator of the Theatre Division at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts will discuss how these collections provide new and more complete ways of understanding the individual's creative process, reconstructing productions. discovering hidden social networks, and comparing interpretations of texts in performance.

Doug Reside, PhD, is the Curator of the Billy Rose Theatre Division of the New York Public Library for the Performing Art and manages all aspects of the division's collections and public services. He joined NYPL in 2011 first as the digital curator for the performing arts before assuming his current position in 2014. Prior to joining NYPL, Reside served on the directorial staff of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities at the Univ. of Maryland. He has published on topics related to theatre history, literature, and digital humanities. He received a PhD in English from the University of Kentucky.