Here Today, Forgotten Tomorrow: Preserving Television & New Media

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From the rise of networked fan communities to the proliferation of content on streaming platforms, television increasingly happens in digital spaces. However, archival practices often imagine that to preserve TV is to preserve a series of episodes, casting online environments as secondary ephemera. We are thus faced with the question: what kinds of digital content should we be preserving, and what methods of preservation best ensure future access? In my response, I argue for combining television preservation with web archiving, a practice that documents and preserves pieces of the internet at a given moment in time.

To get at why this is useful, consider Hulu series *East Los High* (2013-17). At once a teen telenovela and a public health project aimed at Latinx youth, *ELH* takes advantage of its status as a streaming show by expanding outward into other digital forms. Episodes sit at the center of an expansive transmedia ecosystem meant to help viewers translate the show's narrative into sexual health interventions in their own lives. Beyond the main episodes on Hulu, there is a website (https://eastloshigh.com) that pairs each episode with relevant educational content, a widget that directs users to the nearest Planned Parenthood location, and a number of web series that follow characters from the show through deeper individual engagement with topics like queerness, HIV status, and parental abuse. Crew members also interact with fans via fictionalized social media accounts, where they inhabit the personas of East Los students.

So, how might we preserve streaming media such as this? Hulu releases some of its series on DVD (*The Handmaid's Tale,* for example, was repacked for commercial sale), but *ELH* is unlikely to be one of them. And, even if it is, there's a lot of stuff beyond the series' four seasons of episodes that scholars would benefit from being able to access. The boundaries between content and context are porous here: the show's creators put a lot of time and money into crafting other forms of digital media to extend the main narrative and mobilize engagement with it. The website, web series, and social media accounts will not automatically persist through time unless someone preserves them. In fact, in the time I've been writing this response, an online betting company hacked eastloshigh.com.

The tools of web archiving consequently become useful here. There are a lot of them out there, but I want to focus on Webrecorder (https://webrecorder.io/) because I think it holds the most promise for multimedia archiving. Better known tools like the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine (https://archive.org/web/) imagine the website as the unit of preservation: if I use the Wayback Machine to capture *ELH*'s site, I get the textual content but not the video and interactive elements. Webrecorder, on the other hand, archives all the pieces of a website you trigger in your interaction with it. If I go to

eastloshigh.com and play an episode of the web series "Ceci's Vlog," Webrecorder archives the video in addition to the website page; it also captures any other sites I navigate to via link. Thus, this tool offers the ability to preserve the way an individual user moves through a digital environment, encountering multimedia content and moving between web pages. This is of course a partial and subjective account of how one might interact with a digital environment (perhaps analogous to a video game playthrough) but it is differently valuable than the series in itself. Archives of this sort can help us understand how digital video comes to matter within particular online contexts, and provide the raw material for analyzing how streaming platforms themselves change over time.

To be clear, I don't see web archives like the ones Webrecorder produces as a replacement for existing tools of television preservation. We should use DVDs when they are available, but, as media industries embrace transmediation and produce more and more online content, we should also think about how we might archive digital media as environments.