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<tr>
<th>PI NAME</th>
<th>Rosenblum, Brian L. / Ortega G. Elika</th>
<th>ACADEMIC RANK</th>
<th>Associate Librarian/Postdoctoral Researcher</th>
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<td>DEPARTMENT</td>
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<td>ADDRESS</td>
<td>1425 Jayhawk Blvd</td>
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<td>E-MAIL ADDRESS</td>
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<td>Libraries</td>
<td>CHAIRPERSON</td>
<td>Kent Miller &amp; Mary Roach</td>
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<td>KEY WORDS</td>
<td>(Provide up to 50 characters maximum that describes your project in disciplinary, subdisciplinary terms.)</td>
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<td>Preservation, electronic literature, hardware and software obsolescence</td>
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I. SUMMARY OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES (1 page maximum). This summary must explain what is to be done and its significance in a manner intelligible to any faculty member, regardless of discipline.

The Electronic Literature Organization, the main authority in the field in the United States, defines Electronic Literature (E-Lit) as "works with important literary aspects that take advantage of the capabilities and contexts provided by the stand-alone or networked computer." Different from print literature, E-Lit requires specific settings (hardware and software) and distinct practices for its preservation, accessibility, dissemination, and study.

Early Electronic Literature created before the popularization of the web, roughly between 1984 and 1994, currently presents many access and preservation challenges. Ideated and authored by means of the software and hardware capabilities of their time, classical E-Lit works like William Gibson's Agrippa, bpNichol's First Screening, Stuart Moulthrop's Victory Garden, Shelly Jackson's Patchwork Girl, and Paul Zelevansky's Swallows, among others, are commonly inaccessible, and thus practically impossible to study. Stored in now obsolete storage media like floppy disks, and programmed on discontinued software like Forth-74 and BASIC, researchers are forced to approach these works by resorting to either vintage computers usually unavailable in academic institutions or experimental software emulators posing potential copyright problems.

Although this kind of research has gained attention in a handful of specialized centers in the US, an initial evaluation of the resources available at KU reveals that there is a lack of equipment necessary to access and study early digital works. Through this project, we seek to start a discussion on Electronic Literature, the importance of its presence in library collections, and its use in academic departments' research and teaching projects at KU.

The outcome of the project is itself the acquisition of equipment and original works crucial to start and engage in conversations within KU libraries and KU more broadly about the issue of obsolescence and inaccessibility of Early Electronic Literature. The issues posed by these literary works and the computing equipment needed to read them will also lead to the acquisition of skills to deal with them. The funds requested will also, therefore, be put towards travelling to the Media Archaeology Lab at the University of Colorado Boulder (http://mediaarchaeologylab.com/) where Élika Ortega will learn the preservation, research, and accessibility practices put into place there. Founded in 2009 at the University of Colorado at Boulder as a place for research and teaching using obsolete tools, hardware, software and platforms from the past, the Media Archaeology Lab preserves and maintains access to historically important media of all kinds, and is the largest lab of its kind in North America.

The work carried out in this project will be recorded in a report and circulated among interested parties at KU. The work done will be incorporated into the PI's larger research activities, and lead to publication and presentation opportunities at professional conferences. For Rosenblum, the project will serve as a pilot project for establishing such research capacities within the Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities and KU Libraries. For Ortega, the work done will be incorporated into her larger postdoctoral research activities, which focus on digital literature, materiality, reading practices and interfaces, and related topics. Furthermore, the works and the equipment will be available to KU Libraries staff and the KU community in general either as an opportunity to view and interact with the works or to carry out explorations of their own.

RESEARCH PLAN, SUPPORTING DATA, AND PROPOSED TIME SCHEDULE

This research project will result in the acquisition of a basic collection of works of Electronic Literature, the equipment necessary to read and interact with them, and the skills and expertise needed to manage, preserve, and study them. The collection and skills will enable further teaching of and research on Electronic Literature at KU.

Works of Electronic literature (E-Lit) are heavily anchored in the synchronic media structures of their time of production. Early Electronic Literature has therefore inherited the problems of obsolescence, systems incompatibility, and interoperability that we saw in the 1980's and the 1990's, which currently pose problems of preservation and accessibility in libraries around the world. Furthermore, E-Lit works have rarely been created using mainstream digital publishing conventions. Conversely, many of these works intentionally push the boundaries of what can be done commercially and operationally replicated.

Supporting Data

Early works of E-Lit were commonly created using specific and usually proprietary softwares or hardwares. This characteristic forces researchers and archivists to reproduce somehow their original production conditions in order to read, preserve, and study them. A popular response among researchers has been to create emulators capable of working with obsolete programs and reading decades old works of electronic literature. Two examples of these efforts are:


Nevertheless, like any other computer program, emulators too are subject to obsolescence and copyright issues. A second approach has been found in the field of Media Archaeology where the recovery of obsolete machines enables access to works originally meant to be read in them. Examples of this approach are:

- Dene Grigar’s Electronic Literature Lab (http://dtc-wsun.org/wp/ell/)
• Lori Emerson’s Media Archaeology Lab (http://mediaarchaeologylab.com/)

Both approaches require a renewed skillset and access to equipment that has been likely discarded at most higher education institutions, and thus remain the field of action of only a handful of scholars.

The obvious difficulties for the study of early E-Lit have made it a compelling field to study that draws from the expertise of librarians, archivists, and media and literary scholars, and fosters a productive exchange of skills. In this project, we aim to acquire a starting set of equipment and the basic working skills to initiate a discussion on Electronic Literature at KU that can be extrapolated to other areas of digital or non-digital archiving, teaching, and research across the libraries and the campus.

Project Schedule:

The development of the project will be carried out following this timeline:

• Month 1: Identification and acquisition of the necessary equipment (hardware and software) through specialized sellers usually found on vintage computing forums and more commonly on commercial outlets like eBay.

• Month 2: Assessment and optimization of the hardware and software conditions in order to ensure they all are in working condition and thus conducive of further research.

• Month 3: Best practices exploration and learning from expert institutions and partners, including a trip to the Media Archaeology Lab at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

• Month 4-6: Interviews and discussions with potential partner units and individuals at KU--including Spencer Research Library and University Archives, faculty in English, Film & Media Studies, and Computer Science—to gauge their interest in working with this material. Analysis of the project results, writing the report, and circulating it among interested parties at KU libraries. (See more details about the report below.)

Outcomes:

1. Furthering the P.I.’s research: Once the project is completed, the works and the equipment will continue to be used as primary sources for Elika Ortega’s postdoctoral research activities. The work done during this project will be continued and incorporated into a larger collaborative project that is currently in development with Dr. Alexandra Saum-Pascual from the University of California at Berkeley. Other sources of funding to further the
project are being applied to in both institutions, among them the Collaborative Research Seed Grant from the Hall Center at the University of Kansas, and the Hellman Fellows Fund at the University of California at Berkeley.

2. The works and equipment will also be made available to KU Libraries staff and the KU community in general to view and interact with the works, for a limited time initially and possibly for long-term access, depending on the feasibility of doing so (as assessed in the project report).

3. Report assessing the feasibility of providing ongoing access to the equipment and works, including identifying:
   - Challenges posed to maintaining the vintage equipment in working conditions and its sustainability.
   - Specialized uses of the equipment and collection, including potential teaching and research projects and partners within KU and elsewhere.
   - Relevance of supporting and furthering the availability of this infrastructure and skillset within the Libraries system as part of the preservation and digital archiving efforts already put into place at the Spencer Research Library and elsewhere.

After identifying these elements, the P.I.'s will evaluate the possibility of furthering these practices and incorporating them into the standard capabilities of the Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities and KU Libraries.