

Preserving Games, Constructing 'Games'

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Abstract: Across many efforts in digital preservation, emulation is understood to be the gold standard. This is the case for video games as well. The process of emulation, often a necessary compromise between preservation and access, fixes the game as one particular interpretation: the software object. Unfortunately, however, this ignores various elements of the game that either do not make it into the emulation or are distorted by it, such as instruction manuals or custom peripherals. The academic field of game studies successfully juggles many complementary interpretations of “game.” What happens when an archival community considers these interpretations for games, such as material aesthetic objects, architectural objects, rule systems, or evidence of a developmental process?

This poster presents the results of a literature review of the current state of game preservation in the US, focusing on archives housed within academic institutions. Breaking down efforts into several categories, including emulation, fan-driven collaborations, and legal issues, I show how each of these reflects a different interpretation of “game.” Additionally, I relate these interpretations to digital archival fundamentals such as the OAIS model. Finally, I connect this back to supporting the efforts of contemporary and future game scholars, and present a set of guidelines for researchers and archivists.

About the author:

Ayse Gursoy is a current doctoral student in the School of Information at UT Austin. Her current research interests cover the preservation of video games as cultural artifacts. Prior to her doctoral study, she earned a Master of Science degree in Comparative Media Studies from MIT. As part of her Master’s work, she studied the wide world of online video game criticism. Her interest in archives began early in life, but was kindled by undergraduate student work in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton University Library, where her first task was creating a finding aid for a collection of Ethiopic Manuscripts.