HEARING THE ARTIST’S VOICE:
A PROPOSAL FOR THE CREATION OF
A COLLABORATIVE ONLINE ARCHIVE OF
CALIFORNIA’S PRIMARY SOURCE ARTIST INFORMATION

by

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Executive Summary

In the fall of 2006 I first heard Jay DeFeo’s voice emanating from the speakers of a computer station in the Koret Education Center at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Her words and the cadence of her voice in conjunction with images of her working on “The Rose” awakened in me a strong interest in the artist as an individual. Soon afterwards, I accepted a position working as a researcher for the Richard Diebenkorn Estate where I unearthed a large assortment of notes, personal letters, transcripts, photographs and other media that clarified how his particular point of view affected his process and artwork. These experiences reminded me of all the artists I have known throughout my life and how their artwork can hardly be separated from who they are as people. I began to realize the immense impact that hearing these artist’s voices and understanding their personal perspectives has had on my comprehension of their works.

As a result of my own profound realizations, I began to wonder how exposure to this type of first-person artist-generated information might contribute to the knowledge of others, especially those curators, students, critics and writers who synthesize theories of modern art for general social consumption and understanding. It was then that I was inspired to champion the cause of facilitating increased access to primary
source artist information by protecting, organizing and providing its proper availability using the most effective and up-to-date technology. The continued development and growth of digital archiving and website tools made this project especially timely and relevant.

The overall purpose of this project is to stimulate concrete action toward the creation of a comprehensive collaborative full text online archive of California’s primary source artist information (PSAI) as a model for other similar archives around the country. For the purposes of this thesis, primary source artist information is defined as any type of first-person artist-generated information including video or film images of artists speaking or working, audio or transcripts of artist interviews, lectures, debates, panels or symposia, rare photographs of artists, and documents written by artists such as diaries, personal letters and grant proposals. This does not include interpretation by outside parties such as curators, critics or journalists.

The ultimate goal of this effort is to facilitate continued use of PSAI by preserving that which is presently haphazardly stored on unstable and/or underutilized media, organizing it in combination with newly-created information and making the results accessible to the widest audience possible. In today’s rapidly changing multi-media and
technological world, where researchers increasingly rely on the Internet, this means that the information needs to be online.

Unfortunately, many key institutions that hold PSAI remain unable to share it. Financial and staff resources are a significant hurdle, as are concerns regarding control of information and copyright. Additionally, in some camps there is a reluctance to change traditional views regarding information sharing. Yet with the new attitude of knowledge sharing encouraged by the growing use of Web2 and other online tools, the possibility exists to make the artist’s voice accessible on a wide scale than ever before.

Data collected within a California-based archive might eventually be combined with that compiled by similar archives from other states and added to an existing nationwide repository, such as the American Archives of Art, in order to compose a comprehensive online repository of America’s PSAI for convenient use by curators, art historians, critics, writers, artists and students all over the world.

In conducting this project, I investigated the development of current online archival data management systems and the importance of primary source artist information to the field in general. I then researched how California institutions currently care for and manage their PSAI. In doing so, I sought to discover the real reasons for why California
museums, libraries, archives and artist estates are or are not involved in collaborative online archival projects. Do these institutions and the professionals who work within them find artist primary source information important? How do they feel about sharing it? What are they currently doing to preserve, organize and make it accessible? What do they perceive to be the biggest obstacles to participation in a project like this? What do they perceive to be the advantages and disadvantages of participation?

I investigated the difference between what California institutions believe about collaboration, sharing information and the importance of the organization, preservation and accessibility of artist primary source information versus what they are actually doing to move forward regarding these issues. I then endeavored to discover what these institutions might need in order to make online PSAI a reality. What would a project like this “look like”? How would it be organized, managed and funded? Finally, I asked myself what product I could create that might help to move this project toward fruition. The following paper present the results of my investigation.

The first section of this paper outlines the methodology that was used to collect both primary and secondary research data. I began with a literature review based on information found within academic journals, scholarly books and reputable online resources. My primary research
consists chiefly of interviews with 22 California art museum curators, collection managers, librarians, archivists, historians, artist estate executors and heirs as well as founders and managers of current regional collaborative online archives such as the California Digital Library and the Online Archives of California. Pertinent areas that fall outside the scope of this thesis including technological details and legal specifics as well as educational theory perspectives are briefly mentioned directly following this section.

The next section reviews current literature regarding the rise of the contemporary collaborative online archive. Issues concerning the digital revolution, the movement toward placing information online, the rise in the trend of institutional collaboration and the importance and uses of primary source artist information are all presented.

The ensuing section reports findings gleaned from my interviews and website reviews. This chapter synthesizes and addresses the predominant thoughts and feelings of professionals in the field regarding various aspects of possible participation in a project like this. I also report on my in-depth investigation of the inner workings of a similar current project conducted in order to discover problem areas that need to be addressed and to find realistic ways that this project might be organized and funded.
The next portion of this paper describes several conclusions that put the above findings within the context of the literature review. Primary source artist information is found to be of extreme importance to the field and, with some pointed concerns outstanding, support on the part of my interviewees for the creation of a collaborative online archive is high. This leads directly to a section focused on concrete recommendations for action. These include attempting to gain specified funding for the project through a 2007-2008 IMLS Library/Museum Community Collaboration National Leadership Grant.

The final element of this thesis is a template for the narrative portion of this grant. This includes a generalized project mission, background and description, design, possible participants and staffing, national impact, adaptability, dissemination and sustainability plans. All of these sections are designed so that they may be adapted to the needs and desires of any institution(s) that intend to sponsor the grant.
Methodology

For this study, my methodology began with a thorough reading of academic literature on the various developmental stages of the collaborative online archive (COA). Special attention was given to discussion of the California Digital Library (CDL) and its successor the Online Archives of California (OAC) as these are the most prominent regional COAs currently existing within California. I also conducted an extensive investigation of the literature regarding historical and current attitudes toward primary source artist information. For the most part, I did not use popular press sources, but focused on information technology, library science, art and museum studies journals, books and theses. These materials were found in hard copy or online at reliable sites such as the Haworth Press website. I chose these types of resources based upon the quality and type of data that they were likely to produce. Combined, they provided a reliable overview of the pertinent aspects involved in the evolution of the California regional COA and of the thoughts and issues surrounding PSAI.

The majority of my primary research consists of in-person or phone interviews with 22 well respected “memory institution” professionals across the state of California. The interviewees included a mixture of art museum curators, art museum collection managers,
librarians, archivists, estate executors and historians from such noteworthy institutions as San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Stanford University Library, The Richard Diebenkorn Estate, San Francisco Art Institute, The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Oakland Museum of California and many others (See appendix E for a full list). I chose these institutions because they serve as California’s most utilized repositories for noteworthy historical information and materials. As such, their collections are the most likely to contain artist primary source materials. Most importantly, the professionals who work within them have the experience and knowledge necessary to answer questions regarding all aspects of this proposal in order to ascertain how best to move forward.

Because of the different missions of these institutions and roles of these professionals, each interview was conducted using slightly different formats depending on the interviewee’s professional category and areas of expertise. For example, collection managers, librarians and archivists were more often asked basic questions regarding the specific information stored within their collections and what they are currently doing to preserve, organize and make it accessible. Meanwhile, art museum curators and artist estate executors were more often asked about the importance and
possible uses of PSAI as well as how they feel about digitization, collaboration, information sharing and online accessibility. (See appendices B, C and D for full interview questionnaires).

In addition to the interviews, I also conducted an in-depth case study on the Museums and the Online Archives of California (MOAC) project, as it is a longstanding regional art-related COA currently existing within California. This process involved delving into the database itself in search of PSAI in order to reveal concrete details about various issues that a similar future project might run into. While the literature on MOAC and its parent archives, OAC and CDL is extensive, the hands-on study of this archive revealed more explicit and tangible results.
Limitations of Methodology

Due to the complex nature of this topic, there are many areas that fell outside the scope of this project. The most notable of these were the legal issues concerned with copyright, the technological issues surrounding details of database configuration and systems setup and educational theory issues regarding the perils of knowledge transmission in today’s open source society.

Copyright issues make up a large part of the literature and came up often as a major concern in interviews. However, the subject creates an extremely complicated area of legal debate that should be addressed fully in another venue.

The literature also focused heavily on the technological issues involved in the creation and maintenance of this type of database. While I briefly address the ability of current technology to deal successfully with all pertinent concerns, I did not focus on the specific details of digital configuration such as the inner workings of Encoded Archival Description (EAD), the finding aid used by CDL, OAC and MOAC.

Educational theory focuses on research regarding new trends in development of knowledge within the internet-based society of open sources and online learning. In other words, it explores the fascinating area of study around how people use and learn from the Internet. This
information is highly important and will most definitely have a great effect on any online endeavor. However, as a collections manager, I decided not to focus on learning theory but instead to concentrate my efforts toward a greater understanding of this topic from the collections/archival perspective.

It should also be briefly noted that while initially researching this project topic I was working as an associate researcher for a private artist estate. As a result there may be some bias in my presentation of the needs and perspectives of these entities.

Unfortunately, time and geographical constraints did not allow me to physically visit all of the institutions that I wished to investigate within the time frame allotted. The Southern California interviews had to be conducted over the phone. In addition, the institutions investigated were limited to contemporary art museums and university related libraries, although the results are applicable to a much wider selection of institutions including private collections, galleries and public libraries. Lastly, it should be noted that dissemination of survey questionnaires was not a viable option due to the fact that there are not enough PSAI holding institutions within California.
Literature Review

“These papers and parchments so long deserted, desired no better than to be restored to the light of day… as I breathed in their dust I saw them rise up.”

-Jules Michelet describing his first days in the Archives Nationales in Paris, 1820.

“Artists’ writings have been resoundingly neglected despite the fact that they buttress a wholesale reexamination of the theoretical and methodological practice of art history.”


“It is our function as artists to make the spectator see the world our way- not his way.”

-Mark Rothko, date unknown.

An archive is “a repository of authentic documents or records identified for preservation” which is “useful for studying and understanding the past.”¹ Its function is to “identify, preserve and provide access to records possessing continuing value and relevance.”² Many people view the content of archives as a record of historical details not necessarily readily applicable to our modern lives. But in fact, scholars of archives strongly argue that, “all archival records are not only themselves the

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product of social, cultural and political processes, they very much affect the [current] working of these processes as well.”

It follows from these definitions and assertions that the ongoing examination and use of archival matter is essential to social and cultural understanding and growth. Whether housed in libraries, museums, historical societies, private estates or universities, the unique contents of these materials serve to help form the ideas and theories that govern and direct our lives. In light of this, it seems evident that we must do whatever is possible to foster their continued use.

Sadly, in today’s rapidly modernizing world, where researchers have become increasingly dependant on ever-evolving technology, many analog and/or outdated materials sink deeper into obscurity on dusty shelves, “just sit [ting] there [waiting to be] read, used and narrativized.”

In order for contemporary researchers to get the most out of these archives, which have been painstakingly built by our forebearers over the centuries, we must find a way to make unique and important archival information within the purview of the modern scholar.

The following literature review will discuss the reasons behind the evolution of the collaborative online archive (COA), specifically focusing on projects within California. It will go on to explore the literature on

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4 Ibid.
primary source artist information (PSAI), which will be defined herein as all types of information issued directly by the artist. These include information captured on video and film of artists speaking or working, audio or transcripts of artist interviews or lectures, rare photographs of artists, and personal or public documents written by artists. The review will proceed to explain how and by whom this information is used and why its preparation for inclusion in California’s online collaborative archives is essential to the growth of our understanding of art and the continued social development of our culture within California and beyond.

**Digitization**

In her book, *Why Digitize?*, Abby Smith defines digitization as when information, whether audio or visual, is “fed into a computer, broken up into 0s and 1s and put together in a binary code. Digits are assigned numeric values which are fixed so that great precision is gained in lieu of the infinitesimal gradations that carry meaning in analog forms.”\(^5\) When stored in this fashion, multitudes of information can be easily manipulated and compacted for high volume storage on disks and in hard drives.\(^6\) Just as technologies like audiotape and computer databases changed the way records and documents were amassed and cared for, the technological

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\(^6\) Ibid.
Advance of digitization has created a huge change in how archival information is collected, preserved, organized and made accessible.\(^7\)

When a document is digitized, the information recorded is not only the written word, but also the visual, and increasingly aural, aspects of the material. The color and texture of the paper, the level of discoloration or disintegration, the style of handwriting and even watermarks are all pieces of information that inform the researcher in his or her interpretation. In fact, this visual information has the potential to be just as important as the content of the text.\(^8\) Digital images allow researchers to access information without having to actually handle the materials themselves. This is not only convenient for the researcher, as he or she bypasses the time and effort spent to find the material physically, but it is also beneficial for the object’s continued preservation. The less an original material is handled, the longer it will remain intact.

The digitization of VHS tapes, reel-to-reel audio, film, cassette tapes and other forms of outdated media is also extremely important. Not only is this older media likely to be more unstable that newer media, the means of retrieving information from it becomes more problematic as time

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\(^7\) Cox, *Archives and Archivists in the Information Age*. 2.

goes by. Why keep a precious record of the image and voice of a great artist speaking on film, when that film is disintegrating and the projectors for viewing it are increasingly difficult to find?

Access and preservation are among the highest priorities of the archive. At this point in time, providing its contents in digital format is the most efficient way of achieving these goals. In light of this, it seems clear that archives have a responsibility to digitize their collections. At the point in the future when digital technology is surpassed by a more advanced commonplace technology, then the information should be transferred again. However, most current archives are still in dire need of attention in this area. Outdated media continues to constitute the majority of holdings and digitization, while in progress, is slow as efforts towards it are critically understaffed and under-funded.

**Going Online**

According to Marydee Ojala, editor of *Online* magazine, the advent of digitization made it easy to “create specialized bodies of knowledge out of an amorphous mass of articles, reports, documents and

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10 O’Toole, *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts*, 1.
statistical data.”12 The Internet, being the hugely successful and widely used access tool that it is, was clearly the logical home for this newly organized information. In many ways, the prospect of “going online” held the “promise of satisfying both preservation and access considerations” for the modern archive.13 Full online text emerged in the 1980s allowing digital documents to be accessed much more efficiently.14 Soon, other technological advances appeared allowing moving images and audio archival information to become more easily accessible online.

Indeed, archival information has become much more commonplace online.15 As a result, the Internet has become an increasingly essential research tool. In tandem, demands for “remote access to resources via the Web [and] speedy delivery of services via the Internet” have grown exponentially over the last few years.16 The researchers of today have largely come to turn first to the Internet, often expecting that they will always be able to find what they are looking for there. As a result, they are progressively less likely to take the time to search for materials in the old

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
fashioned way. Even for the most academic of research endeavors, the idea of spending countless hours and funds on traveling to various archives has become almost unheard of. The result is that those materials that are not digitized and accessible via the Internet are falling out of use. The fact that these analog materials constitute the majority of archival information sources in the nation makes it even more essential that we find a way to digitize them and put them online and into the purview of researchers.

It must also be noted that information on the Internet tends to get recycled and frequently cited, especially those items at the top of the “Google” hit list. If other valuable materials that could add new insights to the field are ignored or unavailable, the overall research pool is homogenized. We must remember that as the demands and expectations of the user continue to grow, so must the quality of online archive content.

When a few pioneering institutions first started posting individual digital archives online, many of their counterparts began to notice and appreciate the advancement. This was especially true for museums, libraries, historical societies, universities and other archive holders within

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a common regional area.\textsuperscript{18} Noting the similarities between their holdings, they realized how their institutions and users might benefit if these collections were combined to create collective repositories whose information, raw data and efficiency of use would rival that of any one archive alone. Initially it was noted that “issues of packaging, formulating, exchanging and managing information are remarkably similar across all memory institutions,”\textsuperscript{19} and so it was not long before several geographical locations in the United States and beyond began moving forward on plans to merge their institution’s digital collections. They embarked upon the long and complicated journey that would be the task of creating, managing and maintaining the collaborative online archive.

\textbf{The Collaborative Online Archive}

The first of these projects was ushered into existence at the beginning of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a federal agency founded in 1976 to “improve museum, library and museum services” \textsuperscript{18}

Laurie Gemmill and Angela O’Neal, “Ohio Memory Online Scrapbook: Creating a Statewide Digital Library” Library Hi Tech 23, no. 2 (Summer 2005), 172.
library and information services” under the Museum and Library Services
Act.20 Today, IMLS has two main divisions, the Office of Museum
Services (OMS) and the Office of Library Services (OLS) both of which
exist in order to “encourage and assist [museums/libraries] in modernizing
their methods and facilities so that they may be better able to conserve our
cultural, historic and scientific heritage and to ease the financial burden
born by [them] as a result of their increasing use by the public” and to
“promote [library/museum] services that provide access to information
through electronic networks.”21 Digitization projects are a major IMLS
priority. According to the latest version of Status of Digitization and
Technology in Museums and Libraries, “56.4 percent of all IMLS library
museum partnerships and collaborations are of an exclusively or primarily
digital nature.”22 The continued existence of this program is a testament to
how various types of “memory institutions” are aligning themselves both
technically and theoretically.23

Many current incarnations of the collaborative online archive
(COA) are regional storehouses for significant archival information
regarding a particular geographical location. These include the Mississippi

22 Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). “Status of Digitization and Technology in
Museums and Libraries”; available from http://www.imls.gov/resources/TechDig05/Technology
23 Grant and Miller.
Digital Library Program, the Southern Oregon Digital Archives, the Ohio Digital Scrapbook and the Online Archives of California, among many others. There is even a project in Australia, the Australian Digital Collection. All involve the combined online access of digital archival materials across various types of institutions. These projects respond not only to technological advances but to the call within the museum field for increased transparency and access, as expressed in American Association of Museum’s seminal 1992 report “Excellence and Equity: Education and the Public Dimension of Museums.”

One of the largest obstacles to combining information from different sources is the incongruity of technology used by various institutions. Different codes, formats, software, systems and nomenclature for finding aids need to be seamlessly combined. If these disparate information sources are to be “interoperable” or accessible from one common harvesting point, “a platform independent version is required for

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26 Laurie Gemmill and Angela O’Neal, “Ohio Memory Online Scrapbook: Creating a Statewide Digital Library” Library Hi Tech 23, no. 2 (Summer 2005), 172.
retrieval by all.”

Creation of this platform has proven to be a challenging process. Because of the pre-existing disparities between digital archival formats, most projects have found that their “ultimate goal for such systems is for the components to evolve independently yet be able to call on one another efficiently and conveniently.” The history and development of tools used for this purpose is complex and addressing it constitutes a thesis topic in and of itself. Fortunately, working technologies directed at this issue have been created and are currently being utilized successfully.

Another complex obstacle to collaborative digital online efforts is that of copyright legalities: that is, who “owns” certain information, who gets to use it and how. This legal issue is just as complicated as the technological aspect and will not be discussed at length here. However, it should be noted that, like the technological issues, legal concerns are surmountable and not stopping the forward progress of COA projects.

A third obstacle is less technical and more cultural. There are substantial differences in institutional culture between various

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institutions. Each institution has its own mission, its own definitions and its own priorities. For example, consider the difference in conception of what is meant by the word “collection.” In libraries and historical societies the “collection” is made up of paper documents, photographs, film, audio or video having to do with issues related to their specialty or area of expertise. However, in art museums, the “collection” is defined as the artwork.

The archive of an art museum could contain many important and unique materials that are quite similar in nature to the collections of libraries and historical societies. However, it must be remembered that museums have traditionally functioned as interpreters of objects, not sharers of random bits of information from their archives. As a result, when called upon to share their collections online, the staff focuses on objects, perceiving archives as a separate entity wholly secondary to the museum’s main mission. The result is that archives are often not addressed, particularly as budgets for these projects are usually very tight.

For example, one of the most important art archives in the nation resides at the Modern Museum of Art in New York. Yet during its remodeling in the 1990’s, the museum chose, as its priority, to lease a

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34 Ibid.
space in Queens to display artwork for the public and to close the archives
down for five years. Display of artwork clearly trumped archival research,
as it should in a public art museum. Yet closing the physical archive for so
long without any access possible, seriously impeded art scholarship in the
nation. Circumstances like this are unfortunate because, in terms of the
development and social consumption of theory, it would seem that the
contents of art museum archives might be even more useful than images of
artwork for the curators and historians who use these databases.

Despite these obstacles, the IMLS has found that “newer
technologies that use Internet-based and other kinds of online services and
activities are being widely implemented among all groups” and multi-
institutional collaboration has grown substantially.35 According to studies
conducted by the IMLS, the COA has proved itself to be an effective tool
that has consistently grown in capability, capacity and competence over
the years as well as in popularity and usefulness.36

However, as was briefly mentioned earlier, the process of
digitization, online encoding and management of all collaborative
processes is limited. Most of the institutions involved in these types of
projects are non-profit. In most cases, there is simply not enough money to

35 Institute of Museum and Library Services, "Status of Technology and Digitization in the Nation’s
36 Ibid.
provide the training, staffing, space, and time that is necessary in order to address every important concern.

**Funding**

The IMLS is the largest financial supporter of collaborative online archives. The program states that it is “obliged to establish and carry out a program of awarding grants or entering into contracts of cooperative agreements to enhance the quality of library [and museum] services nationwide and to provide coordination between libraries and museums…including model programs demonstrating cooperative efforts.”\(^{37}\) The IMLS accomplishes this by sponsoring three national requests for proposals: the National Leadership Grants for Libraries Program, the National Leadership Grants for Museums Program and the National Leadership Grants for Library and Museum Collaborations Program.\(^{38}\)

Indeed, the IMLS should be commended for focusing attention on the need for these types of projects and jumpstarting many successful ventures. However, the reality is that from 1998 to 2003 these programs granted a total of only a little bit over $19.8 million to 80 different library

\(^{37}\) The Museum and Library Services Act of 1996. sec 262 (a) and 262 (A) (4).

\(^{38}\) Ibid, 40.
museum collaborative projects, a majority of which were digital and online in nature.\textsuperscript{39} Considering all the work that must be done, this amount is quite small.

It is worth noting that the Government Performance and Results Act, which came into effect in 2000, began a new era of “positive accountability” wherein government funded projects were mandated to prove “tangible production of positive social outcomes”\textsuperscript{40} in order to maintain their funding. Luckily, by their very nature, collaborative online archive projects supply concrete, easily measurable results and so have been a focus of government financial support.

Since these changes began, collaborative online archive projects have become increasingly popular with other funders as well. These include The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Library of Congress, the Mellon Foundation, the Getty Foundation, EMC Corporation and many others, both private and public. However, considering the sheer volume of work that needs to be done, even this influx of financial support is still quite limited.

It must be noted that many funders direct their support at the


\textsuperscript{40} Government Performance and Results Act of 2000.
development of technological aspects such as the improvement of finding aids.\textsuperscript{41} While these are without doubt essential facets, it must not be forgotten that the content of the archive is the ultimate reason behind this endeavor. Most institutions cannot afford to digitize their entire collections. As a result, they must prudently consider which information to incorporate.\textsuperscript{42}

Clearly, the materials to be included in any particular COA must be carefully chosen, ideally in accordance to their rarity, social influence and importance. However, in reality, the materials that get digitized are often simply those that are most regularly called upon for use. This is especially the case in museums where trained archivists and librarians are rarely on staff. Unfortunately, this situation creates a conundrum as lesser-known materials remain buried and inaccessible even if their contribution might be just as meaningful. The question is: which information is chosen for inclusion? Who decides what gets included and why?\textsuperscript{43}

The answer is that participating institutions decide what material is important enough to include based on both their primary mission and the appeal of the material to possible funders. The decision-makers within

\textsuperscript{41} A "finding aid" describes and provides an inventory of primary source materials (manuscripts, papers, pictures, etc.) in a collection.


\textsuperscript{43} Bob Pymm, “Building Collections for All Time: The Issue of Significance” \textit{Australian Academic and Research Libraries} 37, no. 1 (March 2006): 63.
each establishment are guided by their particular institutional framework and priorities.

The primary mission of a library or historical society is often to preserve and make accessible the largest and most popular part of their collection whether it be the local history of the town and the citizens who helped shape it, the development and use of motion pictures or any other special area of interest. Meanwhile, the focus of the art museum is the art collection itself. But what about the noteworthy information that is housed in a particular institution, which is not part of its main mission or included in its most sought after collection? Unfortunately this information, despite its unique importance, is often overlooked.

Whereas all collaborative online archives face the issue of significance, each is different. The remainder of this literature review will focus on issues surrounding the development and maintenance of the California Digital Library (CDL) with special attention to its offspring, the Online Archives of California (OAC). These projects are some of the first and most successful of their kind, and as such are powerfully influential leaders for others around the country and world. (See appendix F for clarification as to how the CDL and OAC are interconnected).
The California Digital Library

University of California’s President Emeritus, Richard Atkinson, established the California Digital Library in 1997. The UC’s eleventh archival repository, it was initially created in order to build digital collections, assist campus libraries with more effective resource organization and sharing, and “provide leadership in applying technology to the development of library collections and services”\textsuperscript{44}. Its current mission is to “provide tools that support the construction of online information services for research, teaching, and learning, including services that enable…effective shar[ing of] materials and provide greater access [to] digital content”\textsuperscript{45}. CDL provides this service, not only for the UC campus body, but also for their outlying communities which, considering the reach of the UC system, spans the entire state of California. In order to achieve its goals, the CDL “utilizes strategic partnerships and technical innovation” to invest in the development, acquisition and management of digital collections all over California.\textsuperscript{46}

The CDL is made up of several sub-projects including \textit{Counting California}, a “new initiative committed to enhancing California citizens’ access to the growing range of social science and economic data produced

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\textsuperscript{44} California Digital Library Website; available from http://cdlib.org/; accessed 2 January 2007.\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
by government agencies which insures easy and continuous access to historical and current information.” Calisphere, a “free public gateway to more than 150,000 digitized items — including photographs, documents, newspaper pages, political cartoons, works of art, diaries, transcribed oral histories, advertising, and other unique cultural artifacts which reveal the diverse history and culture of California and its role in national and world history” and the Online Archives of California, a “digital information resource that facilitates and provides access to materials such as manuscripts, photographs, and works of art held in libraries, museums, archives, and other institutions across California.”

OAC, the oldest and most well-known of CDL’s sub-projects, began in 1995 as the “UC-EAD” digital library project using a newly developed finding aid standard called “Encoded Archival Description (EAD)” in order to make collaboration between separate digital databases easier. Its first incarnation “involved archives and special collection libraries from across the nine UC campuses.” In 1998, after EAD had proved successful, the project expanded statewide to include

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49 Online Archives of California Website.
51 Ibid.
“dozens of archives, special collection libraries and historical societies from university, public and private settings.” 52 It was at this time that they were renamed the Online Archives of California and officially integrated in the California Digital Library (CDL).

The institutions currently participating in this COA include university libraries and special collections, local colleges, state and local libraries, historical societies, medical archives, history museums, art museums, political archives, private collections, corporate collections, park and recreation archives, environmental archives and specialty research centers from across the state of California. 53

From the inception of the project until 1999 all aspects were supported by funding from the California Digital Library Executive Working Group, the UC Office of the President, and by the California State Library through a series of Library Service and Technology Act (LSTA) grants. Additional financial support for various aspects of the project were and continue to be provided by the Library of Congress, The Bently Library Fellowship, The Society of American Archivists and many others. Clearly, there is a consensus that this project is important and that its efforts are of the highest priority to social and academic entities.

53 Online Archives of California Website.
The overall goal of the current incarnation of OAC is to “create a standard based and scalable solution which will, theoretically, allow every library, archive, museum and historical society in California to share collections online.” Many studies have been conducted over the last few years on OAC’s progress towards this goal. They include subjects such as the building the collections, integrating museums, evaluation, access, finding aids and encoding; all of which support the continued success and forward movement of the project. For example, Anne Gilliand Swetland’s study reviewing OAC’s evaluation design system concluded that, “ongoing evaluation is a critical aspect of any digital access project because of the important insight it can bring to strategic decision-making and assessment of data integrity.” As a result, she and her team were able to refine OAC’s evaluation research instruments into “models that might be applied in the collection of benchmark evaluative data by other

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54 Brown and Schottlaender, “The Online Archive of California”, 97.
large-scale, collaborative online archives. A few years later, Adrian Turner reported on OAC’s most newly developed technological tools and services. These include new EAD web templates, a new finding aid conversion support service, voroEAD- a new system for submitting, previewing, processing and storing finding aids in OAC and a Mentor Program that pairs new contributing institutions with a mentor experienced with OAC best practices and guidelines for preparing digital content.

Soon after OACs creation, the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive approached the project with a proposal to integrate museums, which would “round out the OAC as an online resource integrating every major type of cultural institution.” The project to include museum information was called “Museums and the Online Archive of California” or MOAC. In October of 1999, it received funding from the IMLS and by the summer of 2001 it was approaching the second year of funded activity. The mission of this project is to “provide access to collections held by archives, museums, and libraries throughout the state of California.” Currently growing within it are still more art-

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61 Ibid.
specialized projects such as the Japanese Art in the Valley\textsuperscript{64} and Access to Alternative Art\textsuperscript{65} projects. It should be understood that MOAC is not a completely separate entity from OAC, but the name of the project endeavoring to integrate museum information into it. Many other specialized projects have developed within OAC such as the Japanese American Relocation Digital Archive (JARDA), The Cased Photograph Collection - a digitized collection of significant daguerreotype image archives from all over California, The California Heritage Collection and the Free Speech Movement digital archive\textsuperscript{66}.

Considering the purpose of CDL/OAC/MOAC and the strength of support these COAs hold, it seems that any archival area in need of attention within California should be of concern to them. If special projects as specific as the “Cased Photographs Project” were deemed possible due to acknowledgement of the importance of those particular materials, I argue that the same respect and attention should be given to PSAI.

\textbf{Primary Source Artist Information}

As mentioned earlier, for the purposes of this project, primary

\textsuperscript{65} MOAC Website accessed March 30, 2007.
\textsuperscript{66} Online Archives of California Website.
source artist information (PSAI) is defined as any type of first-person artist-generated information. This includes video or film of artists speaking or working, audio or transcripts of artist interviews, lectures, debates, panels or symposia, rare photographs of artists, and documents written by artists such as diaries personal letters and grant proposals. It should be noted that the actual media is different from the information stored upon it. The preservation of the actual media should not be ignored, however, it is the preservation of the information that is of concern to this project.

Common sense leads us to believe that this kind of information would be primarily stored in museum archives, art school libraries, university special collections and private artist estate archives. However, no formal research has been conducted on the state of PSAI within California’s institutions. This fact emphasizes the lack of attention to this area and spotlights the need for further investigation.

Raw data directly from artists is used by curators, art historians, artists, students, writers and critics to develop the theories, concepts and perspectives regarding fine art that are eventually presented to the public through articles, books, presentations and exhibitions. The importance of these materials cannot be under-estimated as their influence so often

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extends beyond the art world to affect the general notions and perceptions of the public at large. In fact, some theorists contend that “the assertions and imagination of artists enable a more responsible vision of culture” and that their investigation is “a part of the process through which cognition and perception become a record of human experience and consciousness.” Some even argue that, “[an] artist’s theoretical strategies [are] instrumental…in initiating debate over contending worldviews.” As such, the potential effect of these materials is boundless. Joseph Kosuth, renowned artist and theorist, admitted that artist statements can be “contradictory, vague and problematic” but he also emphasized how much this kind of information “contribute[s] to the meaning of a work” and incites “discourse about the social relations and functions of art in culture.”

Professionals who address artist autobiographical information do so because they consider this material “as much a part of the construction of visual knowledge as are works of art.” According to Kristine Stiles, co-editor of *Theories and documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook*

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71 Ibid.

“Artists theories and statements are a part of the material evidence and conceptual apparatus of their work and must be understood as an integral component of art historical and critical theory—especially where other kinds of corroborative information are absent. [Artists] texts assist in the comprehension of the relations between art making and history.”

In the past, curators have often ignored the voice of the artist in an effort to maintain an authoritative voice over this hugely influential source. In addressing this issue, Stiles notes that, “Neglect is one of the most powerful and nearly invisible forces for maintaining authority, a fact illustrated by one of the standard jokes among art historians ‘the best artist is a dead artist’. Dead artists don’t talk back.” However, the current push for hearing the voice of the artist has led to the current consensus that “absence of critical discussion on [artist’s] texts is inexcusable.”

Herschel B. Chipp, pioneer champion of the artist’s voice, has commented that his book Modern Artists on Art: Ten Unabridged Essays, published in 1965, came into existence as a “response to the need….for access to the fundamental theoretical documents of twentieth century art…published in now obscure publications often extremely difficult and

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sometimes impossible to find.” Unfortunately, this problem still prevailed forty years later when Renee Daaler, author of the article “Online or Out of Line” published in *Modern Painters* asserted that, “If [PSAI] were easier to find, [it] might [exert] a much greater influence.”

Inclusion of primary source artist information in the Online Archives of California would be a significant step toward its greater accessibility, preservation and use. In addition, the project could serve as an example to other regional collaborative online archives around the country. Eventually these regional databases may come together to form a countrywide or even global repository for PSAI, as the reach of the artist’s legacy does not stop at physical borders.

If PSAI is as influential and important as the literature suggests, then there is no excuse for not making its inclusion in larger collaborative online databases a priority. The fact that this type of information is not the primary focus of any participating institution doesn’t mean that it should be ignored. In fact, it is the responsibility and the legacy of those who build and maintain these larger databases to secure specified funds to pick up the slack where particular institutions do no have the resources to do what is necessary. An effort should be made to attend to it in the same manner that other important information has been. This master’s project

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74 Stiles and Selz, *Theories of Contemporary Art*, xxi.
strives to establish that the inclusion of PSAI in databases like the Online Archives of California is critical for its continued use, not only as an important catalyst towards the evolutionary progress of art theory, analysis, interpretation and cultural development within California, but also as a model for other regional COA projects throughout the country and world.
Findings

This master’s project explores the feasibility of and need for the creation of a collaborative online archive of California’s primary source artist information (PSAI). The literature review covered the evolution of the collaborative online archive (COA) from the emergence of digital technology to the present, before moving on to specifically investigate the birth and advancement of the California Digital Library (CDL), the Online Archives of California (OAC) and the Museums and the Online Archives of California project (MOAC) as they represent the most applicable examples of COA within California to date (See appendix A for a diagram of how these nested archives relate to one another). The review then established the importance of primary source artist information.

In order to assess current attitudes, actions and needs related to this topic, I conducted 22 interviews with prominent museum, library, artist estate and archive professionals. Six interviews were with art museum curators, five with art museum collection managers, five with library archivists, librarians and/or historians; four with artist estate executors and one was with the manager of the Online Archives of California. Each interview was conducted using different interview formats depending on the interviewee’s professional category and areas of expertise (see appendices B, C and D for full interview questionnaires). I
also conducted one in-depth case study focused on MOAC, the largest and most advanced art-related collaborative online archive currently existing within California.

In general, my primary research corroborated the literature. Two key themes that emerged are: 1.) California’s primary source artist information is unanimously considered to be important and useful to curators, researchers, scholars and the public at large and 2.) while California institutions in possession of original PSAI would like to move toward its greater preservation, organization and accessibility (and in some cases are), their progress is hindered by institutional priorities and/or financial limitations.

In order to assess current practices and attitudes toward primary source artist information (PSAI), I asked six curators at art museums throughout the state if they found this type of information worthwhile and significant. All of them replied that PSAI is extremely valuable and that they personally rely upon it and look to it often. Stephanie Hanor, of the Contemporary Museum of Art San Diego (MCASD) feels that this type of information is “key” and that, among other things, she uses it to “create exhibition themes.” Richard Rinehart, Digital Media Director & Adjunct Curator at the Berkeley Art Museum /Pacific Film Archive (BAM/PFA) and founder of the Museums and the Online Archives of California
(MOAC) project said that PSAI is “absolutely important” to him and his colleagues. He added that many local art museums including SFMOMA and BAM/PFA have recently made a “conscious decision to emphasize the voice of the artist” in public interpretation and that PSAI is essential to this goal. Philip Linhares, chief art curator of the Oakland Museum of California (OMC), agreed, noting that he often uses direct artist quotes found in OMC’s original PSAI collection to support understanding of the works included his exhibitions. To illustrate the informative quality of these materials (specifically audio taped artist lectures), he related the following anecdote:

“They [artists] would tell stories [and] the stories would connect up with the work. Mike [Henderson- an African American abstract painter of the 60’s and 70’s] said that he had a studio out by the baseball stadium and he could always hear the baseball games being played at night and during the day and it reminded him of when he was playing baseball back in Marshall. They would have the black team play the white team and the white umpire would cheat for the whites and the black umpire would cheat for the blacks. So, Mike was finally going to be the umpire and in the last inning he called a black guy out and the white guys won the game. After that he had to walk around the back of the barbershop where all the black guys hung out and they would throw rocks at him. But that evolved into the whole series of paintings where he would throw balls of paint at the canvas. All of these paintings [sprang] from [this] baseball [experience]. Somehow it was cut from the whole cloth. [Artist’s] experiences [can] translate in a very convoluted and arcane way.”
This story emphasizes how PSAI in a museum’s archive can be essential for curators in their role as interpreters of art for the greater public. Timothy Anglin Burgard, Curator-in-Charge of American Art for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (FAMSF), stated that he "can't imagine any curator not utilizing every primary source available when conducting research." He added that, "every museum, dealer, and collector has [PSAI] that is not readily accessible and that may be especially important because it hasn't been accessed or published." He believes that PSAI, "reveals stories that can be quite revealing, as they often contradict current scholarship." Scott Shields, chief curator at the Crocker Museum of Art (CMA) in Sacramento thinks of PSAI as “the real research” and feels that it “is a more direct path to what [artists] are thinking.” In his opinion it is important for curators, art historians and all other interpreters of art to get their information directly from PSAI because otherwise “it’s like the telephone game. As you get further away from [the primary source] you lose nuance that’s important.”

When art museum collection managers, whose institutions currently hold PSAI, were asked about its usefulness, they not only cited varying degrees of use by curators, historians and other researchers for conceptual analysis, but also unanimously touted its functional benefit to
them in their daily tasks. Artist-created conservation directions, floor plans, diagrams and instructions recorded on paper, audio, video and/or DVD are commonly used by collection managers and registrars to recreate installations and to care for the artwork’s storage, shipping and exhibition needs according to the artist’s wishes. In fact, all of the collection managers I spoke with echoed the sentiment of Anne Marie Levine the collection manager at MCASD who noted that it is now common standard practice to interview artists or send out surveys asking the creators of new acquisitions to thoroughly answer questions regarding such things as “installation instruction, conservation, where and when the artist created [the artwork], what the context of the work is and its exhibition history.”

Many of the collection managers, including Renee Montgomery, Assistant Director of Collection Management and Information at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Barbara Rominski, Head Librarian at San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, added that it is common nowadays to record videos of artists actively installing their works for future reference purposes.

The librarians, archivists and historians I interviewed hailed from university-related libraries throughout California that hold varying amounts of PSAI content. Three of these professionals work in art schools while two others work in larger, more general libraries. Understandably,
the art librarians had a better grasp on their PSAI. Jeff Gunderson, head librarian at San Francisco Art Institute, listed videos, audio, film, oral history transcripts and memoirs of past faculty and students as some of the PSAI included in their collection. He noted that, “students primarily use the lectures” because “they’re sick of reading what other people wrote about Joan Brown and they want to hear it out of Joan Brown’s mouth- not just to read a transcript of it, but to hear her voice speaking”. Janice Woo, Director of the California College of the Arts Library felt similarly that their materials are of most use to students who attend their particular institution, however both librarians acknowledged the occasional visit by outside curators, historians or researchers.

Meanwhile, those professionals working at the more general libraries had a broader point of view. David Kessler, librarian at the Bancroft Library noted that, while their collection does not, by any means, focus on artist information, existing sections containing PSAI can be quite substantial and that the materials therein are just as important to deal with as any other. In Kessler’s opinion “the information [we have] on well known painters and graphic artists like Bruce Conner and Maynard Dixon, …are important things to make available.” Peter Blank, librarian and the Stanford University Arts and Architecture Library reported that they are “currently working on a substantial collection of [an unnamed] California
artist’s papers and notebooks.” Clearly, even within the more generalized libraries, PSAI is found to be of enough importance, value and demand to spend resources addressing.

The artist estate executors and heirs interviewed found PSAI to be of intrinsic and limitless value. However, as would be logically expected, their interest was often more personal than professional in nature. While they do not use PSAI in the same way that interviewees working in the field might, they still consider its preservation and examination an important part of the development of cultural growth. The majority of them have made at least some attempt to stimulate action toward this by allowing chosen materials in their possession to be used by trusted curators, researchers, historians. For example, the Richard Diebenkorn Estate recently supplied SFMOMA with personal family photographs to include in an online digital montage of Diebenkorn’s life for the online public program “Making Sense of Modern Art.”

In addition to heralding the merit of PSAI, the interviewees from the investigated institutions also generally agreed that the digital preservation, collaborative organization and online accessibility of these materials are worthwhile and meaningful goals. However, the number of institutions taking action toward these aims and the types and level of action being taken are a direct product of institutional priorities and financial
limitations. Out of the nineteen museums, libraries, archives and artist estates investigated, seventeen hold some amount of original PSAI. Eleven have taken some level of action toward its digitization and online accessibility. Twelve have participated in some type of collaborative online effort with at least one other California institution, and fifteen would, without reservation, participate in a PSAI specific COA if given funding to support administrative and legal concerns. (See appendix E for a more detailed breakdown).

An interesting division of attitude occurred between the public institutions (museums, libraries and archives) and the artist estates. All fifteen of the public institutions I looked at, expressed wholehearted support for the furthering of PSAI digitization and online accessibility, while the four artist estates did so, but with some pointed reservations.

My research confirms that museums do tend to focus their attention on the preservation and exhibition of the artworks themselves in both actual and virtual realities. This is partly because, as was noted by BAM/PFA’s Rinehart, “Museums do not have the tradition of access that libraries do, where Joe Shmoe can walk in off the street and see everything in the collection…rifle through the records intellectually and/or physically.” The popular trend of sharing every holding is new for museums, spurred by the digital revolution, but not yet fully embraced by the museum community.
Rinehart added, “It has been very unfortunate and kind of ironic that, even though museums [are] long term memory institutions, most of what they produce has in the past been ephemeral. With digital media we’ve turned the corner. All of a sudden it’s this revolution where we are actually remembering the past and enabling those memories to be a resource”.

Rinehart, like the other museum professionals with whom I spoke, insists that he wants to pay more attention to PSAI, especially that which is deteriorating on older media like film, video, cassette tape and reel-to-reel tape. However, the reality is that, even within BAM/PFA’s progressive model of digitization and online technological advancement, only 10% of the museum’s artwork image collection has been digitized and made accessible online to date. This percentage is very likely even less for most other California art museums76. Logically, the priority for these institutions is to finish their primary projects before embarking on similar endeavors relating to PSAI.

Nevertheless, the demand from patrons for online access is strong and this trend is hard to ignore. As a result, most of the art museums questioned have been making an effort to digitize and put online some portion of their PSAI. However, these efforts have been chiefly directed toward newly amassed PSAI recently collected from living artists.

76 Richard Rinehart Interview
Museum professionals like Peter Samis, Curator of Interpretation at SFMOMA, say this is due to the fact that contemporary information is already recorded on digital media and often includes pre-existing written copyright permission for use in an online environment. These modern attributes make it much more efficient for museum staff to put PSAI online and, as a result, the process does not interfere too much with other institutional priorities.

While the effort to get newly created PSAI online is important, the older PSAI, which is in more dire need of attention due to its fragility and uniqueness, is virtually ignored. This is odd because many agreed with Philip Linhares at OMC that PSAI “becomes more interesting as time goes by [and that] it’s really interesting to hear the voices of artists that are long gone.” Linhares reaffirmed that older “videotapes and cassette tapes only last so long” and that the devices used to access the information stored within them are becoming scarce. Rinehart spokecolorfully to this predicament stating, “who even has regular cassette players anymore?”

According to the majority of curators, librarian, archivists and collection managers interviewed, migrating this information to digital format is “the best way to preserve it for the long term” and encoding this digital information for addition to high profile collaborative online archives, preferably ones that are easily retrieved by a general search engine like
Google, is the best way to make it accessible to the widest audience. However, considering the institutional priority of preserving and providing access to images of artwork first and the financial and legal obstacles related to dealing with older PSAI, little resources are available for these often time consuming and expensive processes.

The traditional intent of the library/archive seems much more compatible with the idea of giving immediate attention to PSAI. After all, one of the primary missions of these institutions is to make information as easily accessible as possible. Considering this fact, it would seem that art-focused libraries would be most likely of all institutions to be dealing properly with PSAI. Unfortunately, while their missions and content are in the right place, they do not have anywhere near the appropriate amount of financial support needed to do what is necessary. These libraries are small and most often part of universities who do not have a lot of money to sink into them. Jeff Gunderson, head librarian at San Francisco Art Institute says that his library struggles financially just to keep up with basic student needs. As a result, those researcher and visiting curators who want access to the unique PSAI in this collection must physically come to the library and take their chances with the fragile media that currently exists. Whereas, SFAI would not turn down assistance, it has never been approached by any online archival consortium that might support efforts to
help deal with its PSAI and the staff does not have time to organize funding toward this goal.

Meanwhile, larger, more general libraries like the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley and the UCLA Library often do have access to the funding and collaborative connections to participate in COAs. However, they tend to focus their preservation and online accessibility efforts towards the largest and most sought after portions of their collections. David Kessler, librarian at the Bancroft Library noted that most efforts are directed toward “things for which we have very strong collections [such as] the free speech movement or the California earthquake and fires or the Chinese in California. These are the kinds of topics that are very central to our collections…and so these are the kinds of things that tend to get digitized first.” It makes sense then that, within large collections like these, PSAI is almost never the priority. Even if the topic of art might constitute a large “section”, it is most often not organized by “primary source” information. The effort needed to go through the collection in order to pick out PSAI in particular would be an extremely time consuming process. Peter Blank, librarian at Stanford Arts and Architecture library says that Stanford acquires many hundreds of boxes of raw data representing various collections each year. Those materials that are earmarked for time consuming and expensive processing “vary
from collection to collection depending on the priorities of the curators who lead the mission to acquire the collection and the interests of whomever provided funding.”

According to all the librarians I interviewed, libraries also fall prey to the “low hanging fruit” phenomenon, where things that are easier to handle, like the more modern digital materials, are dealt with first. While convenient and seemingly productive, this is a dangerous road for museums and libraries to tread. While they work to make their online databases look full, some of their most prized and irreplaceable materials sit unused and in danger of deterioration to an unusable state.

Most artist estate executors and heirs feel that digitization and sharing of PSAI information is important, but that the materials to be shared must be carefully reviewed and decided upon as appropriate/necessary for public consumption. In addition, of great importance to them was the reliability and trustworthiness of the entity/purveyor who would be in charge of the project. Gretchen Grant summed up this shared sentiment when responding to the question of whether she would share estate information in a collaborative online archive. She stated simply that, “it depends completely [on] the parameters of the project, who was doing the project, the [affiliated] institution, the scope and the level of availability.”
Many of the interviewees expressed concern about secondhand online information and the safety of releasing information in this manner.

However, even for artist estates, dealing with the actual artworks often takes precedence over dealing with primary source archival material. Grant has spent “over 15 years of her life” devoted to organizing her father’s artworks in a digital database that is currently being used to create a Catalogue Raisonné of his life’s work.

Mrs. Grant has stated that she would only trust herself or members of her immediate family to go through raw PSAI to decide what is fit for public consumption. However, when asked about her feelings regarding giving attention to these materials, she stated, “Do I want to spend the remainder of my life going through all my father’s old papers and choosing what to digitize? No, not really.” Many private estates have been misrepresented by various researchers, journalists, critics and writers—especially those who post in online blogs that often contain grave misinformation. Their reaction is to be very wary of whom they share information with and to keep a tight reign on their materials—especially when it comes to the Internet. This distrust narrows the likelihood of artist estate participation in COAs and, as a result, keeps an unknown amount of culturally important information from reaching the public.
Museums and the Online Archives of California: A Case Study

As was discussed in the literature review, MOAC is the most well known art-related archival online consortium within California. Much about the basics of MOAC and its predecessors was explained in the literature review. However, online investigation of the actual state of this COA in addition to an in-depth interview with Richard Rinehart, its founder, uncovered further information.

The MOAC project, unlike many other COAs, does not have a physical location. There are no specified offices or personnel that work for it as an independent entity. Instead, MOAC is the digital, online merging of various independent museum collection databases that have organized themselves, agreeing to digitize and encode their information according to a meticulously crafted “best practices” system. At this time, the institutions participating in MOAC include the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archives, The Oakland Museum of California, The Japanese American National Museum, The Phoebe Heart Museum of Anthropology, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the California Digital Library, the Iris B. and Gerald Cantor Center for the Visual Arts at Stanford, the Ruth and Sherman Lee Institute for Japanese Art at the Clark Center, UC Berkeley Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley Museum of Paleontology, UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, UCLS
Fowler Museum of Cultural History and UCR/California Museum of Photography. Clearly, not all of the above institutions are art-related, but this site still holds the most art-related online information that any other COA in California.

One can most easily access MOAC through use of its parent COA, the Online Archives of California. Typing “Online Archives of California” into Google will lead directly to the OAC website. Clicking on ‘Virtual Collections” within OAC will lead to a list of specialized collections, one of which is MOAC. Once brought to the MOAC website page, users are given several choices for searching the collections and learning about MOAC and its processes.

The site includes sections describing the history of MOAC, user evaluations and surveys, articles, reports and documents on the success and progress of MOAC from various sources, a detailed description of MOAC’s standard best practices and descriptions of the development, projected content and purpose of special projects such as the newly funded Japanese Art in the Valley project, the Access to Alternative Art project, the CDL Image Demonstration project and the MOAC Community Toolbox project.

However, the average researcher visiting this site is there for the purpose of locating particular archival information. One can accomplish
this task by either browsing specific collections held at particular institutions by clicking on the names of those institutions, or by searching throughout all collections by entering a general word, creator name, creator country/culture, object type, object title, object date or media/material type into an overall search field.

In March, 2007 I decided to pose as a curator endeavoring to find primary source artist information on the American photographer Dorothea Lange within any and all of the participating institutions. I chose this particular artist because, during my research, I discovered that the Oakland Museum owns a lengthy interview with her that was recorded upon a set of 15 audiocassette tapes.

I began my search by typing her name into MOAC’s overall search field. A list of photographs appeared along with titles, dates, the name of the institution holding these materials and call numbers for the particular materials themselves. I decided to click on the link next to a black and white photo of a little girl which was entitled “Steep Ravine Cabin, Easter 1960.” This brought me to a page that, along with the image and previous general information, also listed all of the finding aid subjects that were attached to this photo. They included “Steep Ravine; Marin County, Dorothea Lange, Family, Child, Female”. There was also a link entitled “View Entire Collection in OAC: Dorothea Lange Collection.”
Considering my ultimate goal, it made sense to click on this link, which brought me back to the OAC site. The page it brought me to contained a descriptive summary of the collection including the title: “Dorothea Lange Collection 1919-1965”, the creator: “Dorothea Lange”, the repository: “Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA 94607” and the language: “English”. The only live link was for the Oakland Museum of California. Clicking on this link led me to the official OMC museum website. Once there, I clicked on a link entitled “Online Resources” that I thought might lead me to what I was searching for. This led me to a page that separated the resources into four categories: virtual exhibitions, collection slideshows, curriculum resources and online resources. One of the collection slideshows was entitled “Dorothea Lange Slideshow.” When I clicked on that, a slideshow of actual Lange photographs appeared, but no PSAI was included. I then backtracked to look at the choices listed under the “online resources” category. The only link that looked hopeful was entitled “The Oakland Collection Online” which led to a site presenting “over 7000 Oakland objects from [OMCs] California collections including historical photographs, paintings, documents and objects.” Optimistic, I clicked on “begin exploring” and found myself on a page offering a link to “search the collections.” I clicked on this link and there appeared a quick search field in which I was asked to provide a subject word or exact phrase
that would apparently lead to “results…presented in categories showing you where the term was found in the record.” I typed in “Dorothea Lange.” 163 items resulted ranging from a photonegative of the exterior of Oakland Technical High School to a photograph of the interior of an Oakland Courthouse during a trial. As the search page stated, they were separated into sections of the document description in which the words “Dorothea Lange” was found. One of the findings was under “remarks” in the record, four were under “inscriptions”, but the majority was under “made by.” Sadly, none of these findings included any PSAI in the form of photographs of the artist herself, transcripts, audio, video, diaries, letters, or manuscripts of any kind. Considering that MOAC is a loose consortium, I did expect findings to be separated by institution. However this process proved not only to be extremely convoluted, but also ultimately unfruitful for the researcher trying to find PSAI.

The uppermost byline on the MOAC website reads, “California museums working with libraries and archives to increase and enhance access to cultural collections”. This would lead one to believe that the ‘contextual history’ often found in libraries and archives would be just as important as images of the artworks themselves. However, as was clear from looking at the actual contents of MOAC, a great majority of its efforts are focused on providing only access to images of artwork. Richard
Rinehart, the founder of MOAC explained that images were “a natural place to start in part because researchers are most interested in the objects themselves rather than in the contextual history.” In addition, it was easier to start with objects because “very few [museums] have archives or archivists in any formal sense, whereas they all have collection managers and registrars. They already have the apparatus for [organizing] collection objects, whereas there is not a current apparatus for the archives per say.” In effect, the content of MOAC is basically a reflection of the priorities of museum culture.

Funding for MOAC goes mostly toward the refining of finding aids and standard practices, the training of member institutions on how to prepare information for addition and special projects proposed by particular institutions regarding their own collections. Richard Rinehart says that the retaining of independence by each individual institution was a conscious choice made by MOAC so that precious funding would go directly to each museum instead of being needlessly funneled into maintenance of a third entity. Each member institution still has to work within its own means while shaping its processes to meld with the standard practices of the consortium as a whole. Because the consortium is so loose, MOAC may simply be perceived as more of a theoretical joining of already established independent institutions than as a new organism in
and of itself. Seen in this way, it can be said to have the same motivations regarding standard practices for sharing of online information as any one of the independent art museums that make up MOAC as a whole.
Conclusions

I began this master’s project hoping to find that the idea of creating a collaborative online archive of California’s primary source artist information would be supported not only by the current literature in the field, but also by the professional community working within California’s PSAI-holding institutions. Furthermore, I intended to discover the overall importance of PSAI to professionals in the field, and also whether the COA is the most appropriate format for dealing with this information properly.

One of the most unambiguous conclusions to be made from my research is that PSAI is a truly essential ingredient for continued cultural development within the California arts community and well beyond. My findings solidly confirm that this type of information is not only valued but also consistently utilized by a wide range of curators, collection managers, students and researchers throughout the state. In light of their regular employment of these materials and their ardently professed concern for its welfare, I feel that these individuals have a responsibility to direct the necessary processes within their institutions toward proper management of PSAI.

Considering the above, it is not surprising that a majority of California’s museum and library professionals support the idea of an
endeavor aiming to digitize, organize and provide collaborative online
access to California’s original PSAI. They realize that if their institutions
do not begin transforming themselves in order to harmonize with the
rapidly changing reality of today’s technological and social advancements
of open source information and knowledge sharing, they and their
precious holdings may quickly become irrelevant. Of course, this support
was given without equivocation in theory only, as all of those interviewed
knew full well that actual participation in a project of this sort would
require much more than just abstract affirmation.

While curators, researchers, scholars and all other consumers of
PSAI are responsive and positive in the above ways, it seems that they are
often insensitive to the needs of the private artist’s estate. These estates
likely hold some of the most impressive and unique PSAI collections. In
light of this, their contribution to the field should not be ignored or
underestimated. The above consumers, as well as the journalists, critics
and writers who use this information in published articles and books, must
become more empathetic to the concerns of the private artist estates. In
response, artist estates should communicate their intentions more clearly
to the public so that relations between these parties can become smoother
and more amenable.
In addition to cooperation between institutions, there should also be mutual effort between departments within each institution. Many efforts to collect and deal properly with PSAI are being spearheaded, not only by collection managers, but by educators like Peter Samis at SFMOMA who see the educational value of this information for gallery visitors. In addition, digital media technicians should also be “in the loop” as their contributions to the construction of online collaborative archive projects is fundamental and of limitless value. These previously segregated areas of the museum world must learn to work together as progress continues to blur the lines between education, information technology and collections management.

The most pressing concern for all PSAI holders is information recorded before the digital age. While most contemporary art museums are responding to the heightened interest in the artist’s voice by consistently creating and disseminating PSAI collected from living artists in digital format, older data is often ignored. Containing unique information from many deceased artists and recorded on outdated and often vintage media, this irreplaceable PSAI sits in imminent danger of becoming terminally inaccessible in a variety of ways. Fragility of materials like video, film, audiotape and paper as well as lack of access to appropriate playback devices has made this the most ignored and underutilized type of PSAI.
This is particularly disturbing because information of this specific type has been largely venerated as the most potentially meaningful and useful to the field. It is rare and irreplaceable and the fact that its depths have often not yet been studied due to lack of proper access are the reasons why actions must be taken to protect this information immediately and with the utmost care. Therefore, I conclude that all California institutions holding any amount of original PSAI recorded on video, cassette tape, film, reel-to-reel audio or any other type of obsolete media must take immediate action toward its appropriate preservation.

Unfortunately, although the will to deal with PSAI is obvious, it is evident that most California institutions do not have the resources to address it properly. Complicated matters involving legal copyright issues, space, staffing, equipment and administration all require specified funds in order to be dealt with correctly. The meager funding siphoned toward these areas, due to the demands of other pressing institutional concerns, has served to block forward movement in this area.

One issue hindering progress is that no one type of “memory institution” identifies PSAI as a primary concern. There is not enough of a concentration of these particular materials in general libraries in comparison to other holdings and museums have their objects to think of first. The smaller specialized art libraries often found within art colleges
and universities might focus more on PSAI. However they still tend to ignore the special needs of these materials because they are of secondary concern to the university at large. In addition, smaller libraries and archives are often ignored by greater institutions and/or collaborative projects that might serve to help them organizationally and financially. Because of the non-profit nature of all of these institutions, the financial support that is channeled into them must be put aside for priority projects. There simply is no funding available to deal with needs dubbed “secondary.” I conclude that California’s memory institutions must find designated outside funding that can be allocated to the proper care and maintenance of PSAI.

Collaborative online archives are indeed the most efficient and currently utilized way of preserving, organizing and making important archival information available to the largest audience possible. Researchers and the general public increasingly turn to the Internet for knowledge and they depend upon comprehensive open online sources for information on any and all topics. As a result of these expectations, California memory institutions have steadily increased their participation in projects involving the processes of digitization, online accessibility and collaboration with other institutions. In order to support this trend, funding for these types of projects has skyrocketed. The multitude of government
grants from sources such as the NEA, NEH and IMLS and private sources like the Mellon Foundation, the Getty Foundation and the EMC Corporation as well as support from powerhouse entities like Google underlie this phenomenon. The above facts stand as proof that the technological tool of the collaborative online archive is growing in popularity and usefulness. I conclude that California’s memory institutions need to begin digitizing their original PSAI, so that it may be organized and encoded for collaborative online access.
Recommendations

It is clear that professionals working within California’s memory institutions believe in the necessity of dealing properly with PSAI. Because the will to protect and provide access to these invaluable resources is readily apparent when solicited, I believe that the first necessary step is for this undisputed concern to be brought to greater attention. Therefore, I recommend that all California institutions open their archives, within legal constraints, to a preliminary project involving a general survey of their PSAI contents in order to make a simple index of these results available online. The first step toward the eventual creation of a comprehensive PSAI COA is for the public to know exactly what and where these materials are. An initial online index of California’s PSAI holdings will serve to bring the breadth, depth and special needs of these materials to greater attention and begin to cultivate concern for their welfare.

Without doubt, funding exclusively allocated to deal with PSAI will be necessary if this area is to be addressed in a timely manner. As a result, I suggest that a preliminary grant proposal be written to the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) for funding toward the aforementioned initial PSAI survey. Of course there are other institutions that might support this type of endeavor such as the NEA or the NEH.
However, the IMLS seems more appropriate to approach since it is currently the largest financial supporter of collaborative digitization projects focused on museums and libraries - the main holders of PSAI. When writing the initial grant I feel that it would be best to explain the larger goal, but ask for funding only toward the first stage of the process. When the first stage is completed and evaluated successfully, the chance of receiving funding for the subsequent stages will increase.

In order for the initial grant proposal and all following proposals to be taken seriously, it will be essential to enlist the backing of at least one reputable art related California institution that currently deals successfully with managing a substantial online archive collection. In this case, I recommend a primary effort towards enlisting the support of an organization such as the Museum Computer Network, ArtSpace or possibly the Getty all of which have successfully sponsored similar projects in the past. In addition, it would be helpful to attain letters of recommendation in support of the project from well-known curators such as Jane Livingston, an expert on California artist Richard Diebenkorn, and/or any other dynamic industry professionals such as Lynn Keinholtz who is currently organizing the creation of a digital online collaborative archival project focused on modern and contemporary Los Angeles based art-related information. In fact, it may be a good idea to approach Ms.
Keinholz in order to ascertain the possibility of collaborating with her. Her project is very similar to the one proposed herein and, although hers is focused on Southern California, it would not be too much of a stretch to expand the vision to encompass the entire state.

After the existence of these materials is brought to the forefront, the next pressing priority should be to hasten the process of properly preserving the older, irreplaceable PSAI that is progressively disintegrating on outdated media. Transferring PSAI into digital format will allow immediate preservation of the information and eventually lead to greater organization, smoother collaboration and easier access. This process and all that it entails should be funded by a second specialized grant written specifically for this purpose and, hopefully, stimulated by the new attention brought to the issue by the online index. In the bigger picture this grant will serve as the second funding-related step toward the ultimate goal of the creation of a comprehensive California PSAI COA.

A following grant proposal should petition for support to organize freshly digitized older information along with all newly created PSAI and encoding it so that it can be accessed from one or more main online harvesting points. I suggest that the well developed “standard practices” created by the CDL and the OAC be the guidelines for this project as they have proved to be very successful with many similar projects. Other
potential sponsors and collaborators include search engines companies like Google.

One of the main concerns of this project will be gaining the trust and full participation of pertinent institutions. Some of them may be initially hesitant to participate due to concerns regarding control over holdings once they are posted online. These concerns, along with the pull of old institutional patterns and traditions concerning information sharing, may keep many museums, archives and artist estates from aligning themselves with the most current modalities of information dissemination and utilization. In order to deal with this sensitive area of debate, I recommend that a panel of representatives from various California based institutions be formed for the specific purpose of finding ways to overcome these concerns so that all PSAI holders will feel more comfortable sharing information online. This panel should include art museum curators, collection managers, librarians and artist estate executors as well as top of the line online information technology specialists and art law experts. In this way, all aspects of concern can be fully addressed. This effort to change attitudes and practices is essential, for if memory institutions do not find a way to resolve their issues and move into the online world, they and their holdings will be in danger of becoming irrelevant.
In an effort to further ease the process of getting PSAI into the online circuit I recommend that journalists, historians, writers, critics and students become more sensitive to the challenges and concerns of PSAI holders, especially artist estates and artists heirs as they hold some of the most impressive untouched collections. An effort should be made by these professionals to report only estate verified information in articles and books published either online or in hard copy. Whether information comes to the user firsthand or secondhand, it should not be repeated lightly or without confirmation.

In response, artist estates should publicly clarify their positions on the information they have and that which they are willing to share. Perhaps a study on the needs and interests of the artist estates should be conducted. This would serve to delineate boundaries and eventually build trust between the holders and the users of PSAI. Only in this way will the public benefit from the multitude of important information that is currently being kept from the public eye within the walls of artist estates.

In addition, I recommend that the various department heads and professionals within each institution respectively take a leadership role in insuring the success of existing inter-institutional collaborations by making an effort to communicate among themselves more smoothly. Projects like the one proposed herein need, not only proper departmental
collaboration, but also strong and effective leadership. In light of this, I recommend that there be a single point person who manages the project paying special attention to cross collaboration and effective communication between departments and between institutions. Clear communication and effective participation of all of the above individuals and institutions, in both the initial survey of PSAI and the continued process of digitization, organization and eventual online accessibility of this information, is essential to the eventual creation of a comprehensive PSAI COA that can truly serve its audience and act as an example for nascent projects in states around the country. The success of these efforts will serve to enlighten the public by making the essence of artwork come alive in new ways through use of the artist’s voice.
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