
Mapping the Meshwork of the Independent Media Arts

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During the late-1960s and early 1970s, independent media artists imagined a network of organizations that would support the production, distribution, exhibition, preservation, and study of film and video not only in the known centers of activity (New York City and San Francisco), but across all regions of the United States. By 1980 the Media Arts Center Movement had gained significant momentum leading to the establishment of the National Alliance of Media Arts Centers (NAMAC). These centers included national players, such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, along with regional organizations like the Rocky Mountain Film Center and Pacific Film Archives, and other metropolitan organizations like Pittsburgh Filmmakers (one of the oldest remaining active media arts centers). These organizations provided services for artists – funding and equipment rentals – and to the surrounding community – screenings, coursework, and study collections. NAMAC changed its nomenclature in the mid-1990s to the National Alliance of Media Arts and Culture, yet the legacy of the media arts center movement continues today. Mapping the Independent Media Community (MIMC) is a project that seeks to illustrate the impact of the individuals and organizations that were part of this larger movement to support the development of independent media arts, not just in the United States, but across the globe.

MIMC is currently in its first phase of development, generously funded by a Major Project Grant from the University of Iowa. Partnering with Carnegie Museum of Art (CMOA) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the MIMC team at the University of Iowa has worked in conjunction with CMOA's Time-Based Media Project (funded by a grant from the A.W. Mellon Foundation) to digitize and provide access to records contained within the CMOA's Film Section Archives (spanning 1970-2002). The MIMC prototype is based on the data contained within the *Film and Video Makers' Travel Sheet* and *Film and Video Makers' Directory* published between

1973 and 1987. The *Travel Sheet*, a monthly publication, served as a social networking tool for media artists and media arts centers. At no cost, artists could publish booked tour dates along with a general sense of their travel schedule, while organizations posted the contact information for their internal programmers, indicating a willingness to host makers. Over the years, the *Travel Sheet* grew to include sections for new works available, film festival announcements, and other advertisements of general interest to film and video makers. The *Directory*, published in 1978 and 1979 included the information of all of the individuals and organizations subscribing to or listed in the *Travel Sheet*. From its humble beginnings as a single hand-typed 11x17 sheet of paper, the publication grew to include thousands of individuals and organizations from all corners of the globe. Using the data from the *Travel Sheet*, this first phase of the MIMC project serves as a prototype for a much larger and more robust application that will visualize data from a wide variety of sources in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Media Arts Center Movement in the United States as well as global independent media production, distribution, exhibition, preservation, and study.

The MIMC database (built using the University of Sydney's Heurist Academic Knowledge System) currently holds only a few years of the *Travel Sheet* data. However, even this small subset of the data MIMC illustrates that the Media Arts Center Movement was indeed successful in building a wide-reaching network of organizations and individuals. The image below represents a sample of data from New York-based artists reported between 1973 and 1975 in the *Film and Video Makers Travel Sheet* (data from 26 artists residing in New York City and New York state).

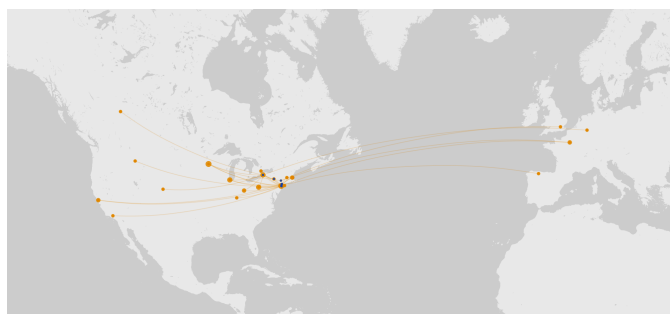


Figure 1: Selected event data from the *Film and Video Makers Travel Sheet* 1973-1975 (created with Palladio).

In the above image, the artists' home address is represented in blue while the event location is repre-

sented in orange (the event locations are sized according to the number of events, 99 total). This visualization demonstrates the connections between organizations and individuals emerging from the data in the *Travel Sheet*. Here we can see the beginnings of a network that extends beyond the United States and into Europe and Canada. As data entry and analysis continues, the data promises to demonstrate a global network of artists and media arts organizations as a sample from the 1979 *Film and Video Makers' Directory* illustrates, below.

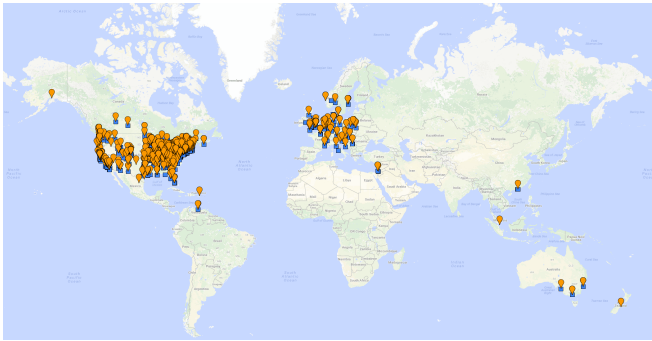


Figure 2: Organizations (square) and Individuals (teardrop) from the 1979 *Film and Video Makers Directory*

While the term network was the preferred terminology of the Media Arts Center Movement, this is an overly simplistic understanding that masks the complexity of the MIMC data. Anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that the lines of a network are connectors, static points joining two nodes, that presume an absolute connection that does not fully illustrate the complexity of the relationship. In contrast, Ingold offers the concept of the meshwork, suggesting that these lines are not connectors, but the “lines of becoming” from Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome (Ingold, 2013: 132). These lines do not meet – the nodes in the network map instead represent knots and entanglements in the meshwork, places where lines emerge and diverge rather than connecting in absolutes. The meshwork, like the rhizome, affords multiple narratives and entry points; it offers no hierarchy or structure. MIMC seeks to offer this alternative mapping of the meshwork – the entanglements between artists, distributors, museums, governmental bodies, local communities, and countless other actors in the fabric of the independent media arts.

Unlike other digital humanities approaches to cinema and media history, like Jeffrey Klenotic’s [Mapping Movies](#), MIMC provides access not only to a representation of the history of the independent media arts, but access to the archives that hold these traces as well.

The MIMC data model includes the provenance for each discrete data point in the database, linking individual records back to the primary source material from which it was derived. These connections will afford opportunities to link directly to the digital archives that hold the digital surrogates as these records, allowing MIMC to serve as an extension of these archival collections as a digital finding aid of sorts. In this way, MIMC is enfolded in the archives; the project does not derive-from but is entangled-with the archival organizations and other sites that hold the history that MIMC seeks to represent, continuing to build the meshwork that entangles the various organizations and individuals represented in the visualizations. In locating and documenting these archival traces, MIMC provides an understanding not only of the historical unfolding of the independent media arts and Media Arts Center Movement, but of the archivalization of this history as well – the project itself becoming further enmeshed and entangled in the very history that it seeks to uncover.

This brief paper will introduce the MIMC project and discuss the development of the MIMC application as well as the potential impact of the project as a Public Digital Humanities resource for scholars and for the archives that collect and provide access to the primary source materials from which the MIMC data is derived. In addition to the database and visualizations, by preserving the source information for each record and linking to the digitized archival records (or archival finding aids), MIMC links the archive of the independent media arts that is distributed across archives, personal collections, the active and inactive organizations that are part of this vast meshwork. While there is still much work to be done, MIMC promises to provide widespread access to historical data that can be re-used and re-imagined beyond the initial bounds of the project.

Bibliography

Ingold, T.(2013). *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, New York: Routledge.