

Intrigued whether the cultural divide between sports and the arts would translate at all to an archival situation, the two institutions I selected for this comparison were the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum (abbreviated hereafter as the Hall of Fame) and Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI). These organizations have significantly different collecting policies and thus quite varied material - the Hall of Fame features a mix of Major League Baseball-related print and audiovisual items for viewing, while EAI collects experimental and avant-garde digital materials and video, and offers only streaming digital files or DVDs for viewing. However, upon examining the presentation of information at both archives, the glaring differences (whether in facilities, website design, or catalog efficiency) proved to have little to do with the subject of the material held, or even the format, and everything to do with the embrace of digital access systems over analog methods.

Considering trends in modern research, the most logical place to begin the evaluation was by examining each institution's website. Both the Hall of Fame (baseballhall.org) and EAI (eai.org) do an excellent job of announcing their institution's general goals and mission on their home page: the Hall of Fame clearly emphasizes their museum, with links aimed at visitors planning to view the exhibitions (information about admission prices, museum hours, special exhibits, historical information on individual members of the Hall of Fame, etc.), while EAI posts their intention not only to exhibit media art, but to more comprehensively foster its creation, distribution and preservation. This difference in institutional priorities has an effect on locating collection information.

The Hall of Fame's archival collections are physically located in the Giamatti Research Center, a different building from the Museum – accordingly access information is somewhat isolated on the website, requiring navigation through a not-altogether intuitive drop-down menu before the Research Center's page becomes available. This delineated, segregated design proves to be the rule for the website's design, not an exception. The Research Center's page offers expected information for physical access, including building hours, fee-based library services (though the actual fees are unlisted), and contact information for requesting a viewing appointment. The Research Center is stated to be free and open to the public “subject to policies for access and use,”¹ although said policies are not listed anywhere on the website. Meanwhile, summaries of the content of the collections are segregated on their own pages in the drop-down menu according to media format (Archives and Manuscripts, Photographs, and Recorded Media), while researchers interested in specific items must go either to the Hall of Fame's ABNER catalog, or peruse the finding aids for individual collections, both again located on separate pages through the drop-down menu (linked to via the Research Center's page but not, for instance, the Recorded Media Collection page). This confused, disconnected design has serious drawbacks for the researcher's workflow: for instance, material from the Recorded Media Collection do not appear to be listed in the available finding aids, making that

page useless for many prospective visitors (those items are cataloged in ABNER; the discrepancy is unclear). It should also be noted that none of the Hall of Fame's material appears to have been digitized; or at the least, none of its material has been made available online. All the materials listed in the Recorded Media Collection are in analog formats (8mm, reel-to-reel, Recordio disks, videotape) and must be viewed in person at the Giamatti Research Center. Virtual access to the Hall of Fame's considerable repository of baseball-related media (including game broadcasts, interviews and oral histories, documentaries and music) is clearly hobbled by a website that was originally designed to assist casual museum visitors rather than scholars and researchers. This online setup treats the collections as “exhibits,” to be viewed and examined more thoroughly in-person, while at the same time hampering a browsing researcher's ability to find exactly what is available to be viewed in the first place.

In terms of intellectual access, ABNER itself is a serviceable online catalog, allowing an online visitor to search based on one (and only one) of eight fields: author, author/title, title, subject, keywords, LOC call number, local call number, and form/genre. No Boolean search options are available, although once a search has been made the results may be filtered by year of publication, material type, language or publisher. If an interesting item is found, the item record easily allows the researcher to then browse similar items based on the same author, subjects, or call number. ABNER is, essentially, an online approximation of card catalog indexing, featuring a good amount of cross-referencing but at the same time limited by a clunky interface and restrictive search options.

EAI, on the other hand, takes a far more integrated approach, one that encourages access of all kinds. The page with information on physical access to the organization's Viewing Room is clearly available directly from the home page. As a distributor, EAI also offers the opportunity to purchase or rent copies of their works – general information about these services (including payment, shipping fees, order forms) are clearly posted, and in EAI's catalog most item records include specific ordering fees for that individual work. Information about the organization's preservation and educational outreach programs are also readily available. But perhaps the most important aspect of EAI's virtual access, however, is that their catalog is completely integrated into their website; unlike ABNER, which must be found on its own page and has its own completely unique (dated) interface, EAI's site always has a search bar in the upper-right hand corner, so that the catalog may be searched from any page, at any time. Virtual access is essentially inseparable from intellectual access. Rather than attempt to transfer data from an older cataloging system designed for print media, EAI has built a digital catalog from the ground up, specific to the needs of its video-based collection. This includes the ability to not only search their catalog by the usual fields (artist, title, year, keywords) but to browse by theme and specially curated “series.” It is just as easy to generally peruse EAI's collection as it is to search for one specific work, providing a very friendly environment for those unfamiliar with the archive's collections.

Similar to the Hall of Fame, EAI recommends interested viewers (the collection is open to the general public) request their materials via email several weeks in advance. Unlike the Hall of Fame, however, where the advanced notice appears to be required in order to locate material, check credentials and possibly set up necessary analog viewing equipment, EAI's restrictions has more to do with the limitations of their space. Only the one viewing room is available, to individuals or groups alike. It is primarily high demand of this single room, then, that requires advanced booking and limits appointments to two-hour viewing slots. Visiting EAI personally, a staff member promptly showed me to the Viewing Room, where my requested materials (several DVDs of works by Peter D'Agostino) had already been pulled from the collection and were waiting for me to watch. After introducing me to the analog equipment available (several different types of DVD player), this staff member also informed me to simply let him know if there were any other physical media items that I wished to view (his desk was about ten feet away from the door to the Viewing Room). Additionally, EAI's Viewing Room features a well-designed "on-demand" digital interface (easily searchable by artist, work title or subject), allowing the user to immediately view any of the over 1,700 works that have been digitized, or check the catalog for more items available on DVD. In essence, for those two hours, the entire EAI catalog is at the viewer's disposal. This is entirely in keeping with all the information on EAI's website, which promises free access to the entire catalog. When initially setting up the appointment, no request was made for me to explain my interest in the D'Agostino pieces; however, once there the EAI staff did ask me to fill out a digital form at some point before leaving. The questions on the form, regarding my institutional affiliation, works viewed and purpose of visit seemed designed more for EAI to gather information about their clientele than to check credentials.

The Hall of Fame's access policies and services are clearly a remnant of the analog era. This is not entirely avoidable, since they are limited by the materials they collect (it would be a massive undertaking, likely rife with copyright issues, to digitize their audiovisual collection as EAI has). But their virtual and intellectual access services are so outdated as to discourage researchers who do not already have a very specific idea of what they are looking for. EAI, on the other hand, as behooves their eponymous association with the electronic arts, has fully embraced and integrated digital methods of access so as to streamline the distribution and exhibition of their content. There seems little room for improvement in the EAI model; the Hall of Fame, however, would do better to treat their archives as a separate institution worthy of its own digital resources, rather than saddle its collections to the museum.

i <http://baseballhall.org/library/giamatti-research-center>