

## Triangle SCI 2024

### Improving Metadata for Better Accessibility to Scholarly Archives for Disabled & Sensory Sensitive People by Dene Grigar, PhD, & Richard Snyder, PhD, Electronic Literature Lab, WSU Vancouver

What good is a scholarly archive if its contents are not accessible to everyone who needs to use them? This is the question we answer with our project, “Improving Metadata for Better Accessibility to Scholarly Archives for Disabled and Sensory Sensitive People” for ELO’s The NEXT (See: <https://the-next.eliterature.org>), supported by Triangle SCI 2023 and a grant from the Society of American Archivists.

ELO’s The NEXT (<https://the-next.eliterature.org>) is a scholarly archive built as a virtual museum, library, and preservation space that houses over 3000 participatory, interactive, and experiential works of born-digital literature, art, and games, seeded by a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 2018. It was awarded the 2022 Open Scholarship Award by the Canadian Social Knowledge Institute. With ELO’s The NEXT we promise five points of accessibility: 1) local files of works are collected, hosted, and shared with the public, 2) works are freely available at any time, 3) the space is containerized so that it can be ported and shared with many locations around the world, 4) its interface reflects the variety of languages expressed in the works, 5) it can be used by all visitors who wish to engage with the works it holds.

Our project is aligned with crip theory and relaxed performance methodology to take a very broad approach to the *fifth point* of this vision. We developed a system, called “ELMS” (Extended eElectronic Metadata Schema), that extends the Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS) maintained by the Network Development and MARC Standards Office of the Library of Congress, to make it possible for physically disabled visitors and those with sensory sensitivities to know what kind of experience to expect from a work so that visitors can make informed decisions about how they can best engage with it. Based on a framework of sensory modalities, such as fleeting content, moving text, blinking and flashing, touch, haptic feedback, repetitive motion, gestures, body movement, interoception, and others (See list: <https://the-next.eliterature.org/prototype-controlled-vocabularies/>), the system pairs extended metadata in controlled vocabularies related to disability access with descriptive language. These descriptive statements, expressed in Plain/Simple English, further detail what disabled and sensory sensitive visitors need to know before encountering a work.

An example of how ELMS is applied to a work in The NEXT is Caitlin Fisher’s *Everyone at This Party Is Dead / Cardamom of the Dead* (<https://the-next.eliterature.org/works/754/0/0/>), one of the first VR literary works produced for the Oculus Rift. Published in 2014 in the Electronic Literature Organization’s *Electronic Literature Collection 3 (ELC3)*, it is now hosted at The NEXT.

Like all the works of born-digital art, literature, and games that The NEXT holds, Fisher’s VR narrative is presented in its own exhibition space. A carousel of still shots from the work presents visitors with highlights from the work. The description of the work, cited from the *ELC3*, provides information about the storyline, the artist’s vision, and its production history. Beneath the description is the section called “Experiencing the Work,”—that is, detailed information that tells visitors what engaging with the work entails, much like one would encounter at a “relaxed performance” that welcomes anyone with disabilities, disorders, or differences are able to participate and enjoy an event as valued patrons. To the right of the space is a sidebar containing the “Version Information”—metadata that includes bibliographic information expected from a scholarly database, such as author’s name, date of publication, publisher, and language. Visitors also see additional information about the work’s digital qualities, its genre, and authoring platform. As importantly, visitors see the sensory modalities evoked when experiencing the work (kinesthetic involvement, proprioception, sight, and sound). They learn that the text format involves inaccessible and rasterized text; that color impacts navigation; that sudden visual transitions take place in the work; that the volume level is inconsistent; that fine control and heading tracking is part of the user experience.

The ELMS metadata schema starts with the premise that all visitors to The NEXT need some type of accommodation to access the born-digital works held in its collections, whether it is information relating to the hardware a hypertext novel needs to function or the sensory modalities it evokes as it is experienced. Visitors who use screen readers, for example, should know in advance that they will need this technology to access a net art piece that requires sight; likewise, those who do not have access to an Oculus Rift headset will be informed when a work, like Fisher's, requires one. In this way all visitors are equally enabled to act upon their interest in accessing works collected at The NEXT.

