Archives of creative practice


Metadata challenges from the physical, digital and intangible

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Questions of creativity

• How do we capture the essence of an idea?

• When does creativity happen?

• Is there a finished work and can that even be recorded?

• Where does creativity intersect with cataloguing metadata?

• Can knowledge of the creative process aid understanding of what we "see" in the archive?

• Might a broad interdisciplinary approach help us to navigate the issues, and does this help the archivist in practice?

The creative archive challenge

- Complexity

- Lack of certainty

- Intangibility of the process and sometimes, as with a live performance, of the work itself

- Constant reinvention and reinterpretation lack of certainty
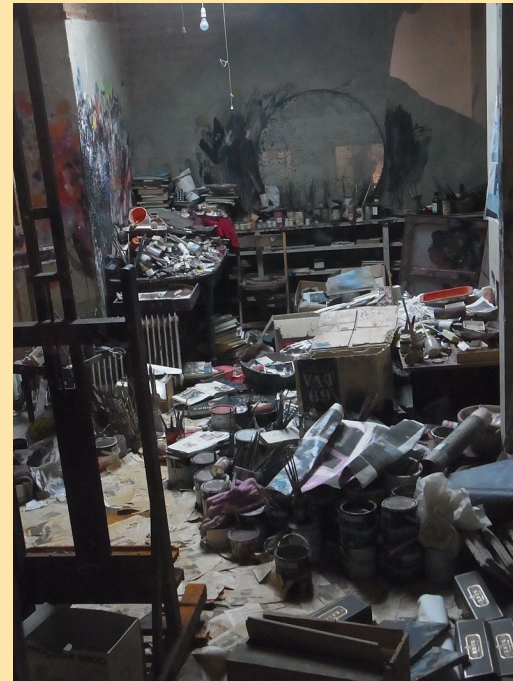
Francis Bacon's studio at the City Gallery The Hugh Lane, Dublin, Ireland. Photo by antomoro - Own work, FAL, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=52072996

The limits of the standards

- Metadata standards reflect the dominant content and context

- Standards do not exist – the performing arts event example

- Creativity pushes the boundaries

- Rigidity of approach

Image: University of Reading

Metadata challenges from the Stephen Dwoskin archive

- Hybrid collection – contains film project files, original writings, articles, research and teaching papers, graphics and artwork, correspondence, financial papers, diaries, photographic materials, hard disk drives, film, and audio footage - **how best to cross reference between analogue and born-digital content**

Image: University of Reading, Stephen Dwoskin archive. Used by kind permission of Paul Venezia.

Metadata challenges from the Stephen Dwoskin archive

- Large volume of digital files on 20 hard disk drives suspected to contain unfinished versions of films, email correspondence, personal documents, and his unpublished autobiography – **how best to explore and catalogue this data**

Image: University of Reading

Possible solutions

- TNA Testbed fund to look at the use of visualisations and MACb timelines to enable archivists to explore and catalogue digital content, test internal workflows, evaluate relevant metadata standards, and explore how best to help users navigate the relationship between online and reading room access

- Catalogue arrangement of digital files – multiple entry points to descriptions of the digital content for the user and addition of subject access records for film titles to 'link' the physical and the digital content

- Work with data from the forensic analysis to compile meaningful descriptions

Visualisation
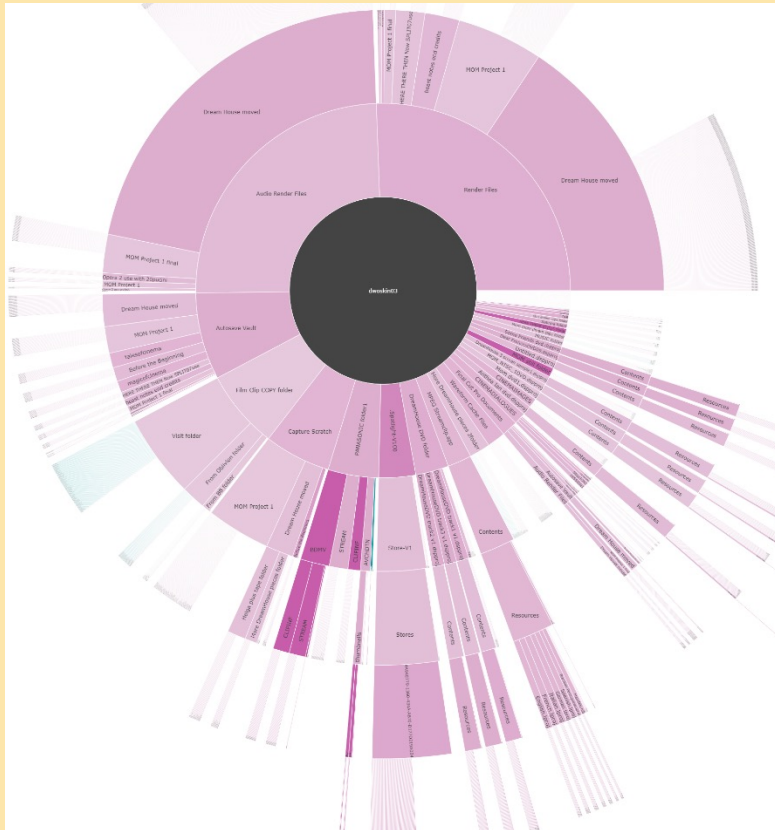
Further information on the use of visualisations in this project can be found in the full publication. https://doi.org/10.1002/pra2.329

Metadata

ADLIB fields	Description	Notes	
Reference Number	Should represent the digital object not the folder structure	Can use System of Arrangement to detail folder structure	
Title		I don't think that this should be the actual asset file title if describing at that level should be a sentence in plain English - but if cataloguing at scale and importing a .csv file into catalogue from extracted data then maybe you would use original file titles	
Dates	File timestamps- can often be a number of dates; these can be unreliable, i.e. Added by computer; Dwoskin project using MACb m (date modified)	MACb m = modified recently MACb a = accessed/opened MACb c = metadata changes MACb b = born digital/first created If estimating dates then provide in square brackets and provide an explanation	Dates from Bitcurator/DROID?
Level	File		
Extent	Number of files and format; file size; download speed (TNA)		
Creator		Can we ever really identify this?	
Scope and Content		This could possibly be used to store supplementary narrative descriptions e.g. Info provided by an research project or depositor	
Subject/Name			
System of Arrangement	Detail file structure e.g. These born digital records were arranged under the following file structure: Hard disk 01\Breath Stills	Provides provenance trail and contextual viewing	
Conditions governing access	Closure info as normal if material identified in a content sensitivity review	Could we use this field to detail how a user accesses the content eg. Via emulation; direct link to VRR; EPADD; content still to be extracted therefore contact RR	
Physical characteristics		Use this for majority of data required by PREMIS	PRONOM for file formats
Existence and location of originals	E.g. Hard disk; disk image; bulk extract; Master versions on DAMS	PREMIS Relations	
Existence and location of copies	E.g. Emulation; access copies on VRR	PREMIS Relations	
Related Objects	Link to relevant catalogue descriptions	PREMIS Relations	
Digital References		In the future can we use this to point to VRR/EPADD?	
Location		How do we standardise this for digital locations or do we not use this and keep only for physical locations?	

ADLIB field		
Reference	DWO P/1/disk001/1	
Title	Still images from the film Breath	
Dates	2002-10-02	Used MacB timelines; Mac-m date modified
Level	File	
Extent	6 .jpg files	Should we record size in MB; should we record download speed?
Name	Dwoskin, Stephen	
Subject	Title of work	
System of Arrangement	These born digital records were arranged under the following file structure: Hard disk 001\Breath Stills	Need to check this with the original disk image
Conditions governing access		Access strategy still under development however it could be one of the following: Emulation via Reading Room dedicated terminals Content already extracted so link to VRR Content to be extracted on demand so user would be directed to contact us for access
Physical characteristics	.jpg file format	Do we need more info here
Existence and location of originals	Storage location of disk image or extracted content file masters? Should we mention actual hard-disks?	Relationships
Existence and location of copies	Emulation? Access copies of VRR?	
Related Objects		Possible link this catalogue record to hard-disk catalogue record
Digital References		Could we use this to point to VRR?
Location		Required?

The future

- Those engaged in research about creative work are often among the most enthusiastic and knowledgeable users of archives – archivists need to respond to that enthusiasm

- Now that digital arts are becoming widely accessible, the potential digital archive of creative practice is likely to continue to grow

- Archivists and data scientists need to work closely with those with knowledge of the creative process in order to find ways to capture, describe and explore the records that it creates

- **Only an interdisciplinary approach can work**

Thank you!

Feedback / questions:

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