Archives of creative practice

Metadata challenges from the physical, digital and intangible
Guy Baxter and Sharon Maxwell
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
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
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hard disk drives suspected to contain unfinished versions of films, email correspondence, personal documents, and his unpublished autobiography – how best to explore and catalogue this data
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
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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADLIB field</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>DWO P/1/disk001/1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td></td>
<td>Still images from the film Breath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dates</td>
<td></td>
<td>2002-10-02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level</td>
<td></td>
<td>File</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent</td>
<td></td>
<td>6 .jpg files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dwoskin, Stephen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td></td>
<td>Title of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System of Arrangement</td>
<td>These born digital records were arranged under the following file structure: Hard disk 001/Breath Stills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conditions governing access</td>
<td>Access strategy still under development however it could be one of the following: Emulation via Reading Room dedicated terminals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical characteristics</td>
<td>.jpg file format</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existence and location of originals</td>
<td>Storage location of disk image or extracted content file masters?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Related Objects</td>
<td>Emulation? Access copies of VRR?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital References</td>
<td>Possible link this catalogue record to hard-disk catalogue record</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
<td>Required?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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:

Guy Baxter
Associate Director (Archive Services)
g.l.baxter@reading.ac.uk
@archivesgb

Sharon Maxwell
Archivist
s.maxwell@reading.ac.uk