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Digital Curation and Information Management: Technological Changes in Art History

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Digital Curation and Information Management: Technological Changes in Art History

Cover Page Footnote

Digital Curation and Information Management: Technological Changes in Art History Summer 2012
Undergraduate Research Grant Joy K. Hyatt Advisor, Karla Huebner, Ph.D. August 15, 2012

Research often begins with questioning. Learning how to perceive something differently means finding connections and breaks in sameness.¹ During my studies as an art history student here at Wright State University (WSU), my education has encouraged the stimulation of knowledge and intellectual curiosity to thrive. The application of my art history and motion picture coursework included the unearthing of multiple perspectives regarding the past, future and their connection to the present. Painting, sculpture, works on paper and motion pictures all speak to the human experience. An interest in their curatorial practices and information management began to emerge.

During the summer of 2012, I embarked on a ten-week research project, under the mentorship of Assistant Professor of Art History Dr. Karla Huebner. This project was called *Digital Curation and Information Management: Technological Changes in Art History*. This project concentrated on a multifaceted interaction between the Departments of Art & Art History and Motion Pictures involving Assistant Professor of Motion Pictures Dr. Nicole Richter, Visual Resource Center (VRC) Curator Shannon Michalak, WSU Galleries Coordinator Tess Cortés, Assistant Professor of Photography Tracy Longley-Cook and curator for the Downtown Dayton Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Film Festival, Jonathan McNeal. The project explored the many phases of digital image curation (the act of curating) through information analysis and management. The assimilation of online and written literature, program analysis, software training, film curation and photo-documentation were major components. This project addressed the practical skills important to researching art and art history in this digital age.

The curation and management of digital information involves several components. In collaboration with the VRC and its curator Shannon Michalak, this project began by researching best practices for learning about image metadata (data on data or information on information) and identifying appropriate software on a case-by-case basis.² By learning how to use software such as Adobe Bridge and Photoshop, Shared Shelf and Microsoft Excel example of metadata organization and management. I then, with the help of Ms. Michalak, conducted quality analysis of cataloged images and their embedded information. We identified gaps within the VRC's image collection, which can be addressed in future VRC projects.

The project required me to initially learn and work with a specific set of digital images in order to being reviewing and tagging (metadata). The embedded data tells the image what it is in terms of color, subject, description, author, date and so on. Dr. Huebner provided digital images relating to her

¹ Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: British Broadcasting Corp, 1972.

² Gilliland, Anne J. "Setting The Stage." Baca, Murtha. *Introduction to Metadata*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008, p. 1-19.

studies of interwar Czechoslovakian visual culture. Dr. Huebner's images came from *Gentlemen*, a Czech and Czechoslovak culture magazine (1924-1925). Initially, hundreds of digital images, written in Czech were partially translated with Google translate, organized into volumes and then issues using Adobe Bridge & Photoshop. These were then cataloged using Shared Shelf, an online software package and database run by ARTstor Digital Library. "This Web-based image management software uses cataloging tools with customizable metadata schemas, integrated Getty vocabularies, and the ability to share and publish collections and offers community collaboration through shared name and work records."³ This allowed the data input of a controlled vocabulary using VRA core for each image from *Gentleman*.⁴ This information was then exported and permanently embedded into Dr. Huebner's images, insuring the data remains with the image regardless of how it is digitally transported, used or edited in the future.⁵ As a result, I created a searchable digital photo collection for research related to imagery of gender and sexuality during interwar Czechoslovakia for Dr. Huebner's upcoming book on the subject.⁶

The research extended to original works of art within the permanent collection of The Robert and Elaine Stein Galleries at WSU. Working with Galleries Coordinator Tess Cortés, archival, preparatory and preservation practices, involving a workflow from primary sources to complete cataloging, served as an excellent research component. A curatorial quality assessment of their digital work records was conducted as the works of art were properly selected and unpacked. Digital photo-documentation occurred after an assessment was made of the gallery collection with the assistance of Professor Longley-Cook⁷. This component was important because of the hands on experience and documentation it offered. The gallery experience provided an opportunity to deepen my understanding of curatorial practices within an educational institution. As a result, the works of art were then measured and displayed for an upcoming exhibition, allowing the curatorial practices to come full circle. Metadata will be created in the future which will include exhibition

³ Trustees, ARTstor Board of. *Shared shelf*. 2010. *Shared Shelf Overview*.<http://www.artstor.org/shared-shelf/s-html/shared-shelf-home.shtml>.

⁴ Harpring, Patricia. *Introduction to Controlled Vocabularies: Terminology for Art, Architecture, and Other Cultural Works*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2008, p. 1-26.

⁵ Baca, Murtha. *Introduction to Art Image Access: Issues, Tools, Standards, Strategies*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2002.

⁶ Besser, Howard, Sally Hubbard, and Deborah Lenert. *Introduction to Imaging*. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003.

⁷ London, Barbara, Stone, Jim. *A Short Course in Digital Photography*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2010.

information, providing greater accessibility to the department of Art & Art History and the WSU campus community.

Thus far, my research had been conducted on still images of original works of art. My interest in motion pictures suggested the same could be done with film.⁸ The connections were surprisingly cohesive as the readings about metadata, analysis, photo-documentation and curation directly related.⁹ Working with Dr. Richter and Jonathan McNeal, the curatorial study and management of digital images, particularly LGBT moving pictures, began with investigating queer film theory. Dr. Richter and I discussed articles such as B. Ruby Rich's article "*The New Queer Cinema*"¹⁰ and Harry Benschoff's "*The Monster and the Homosexual*".¹¹ These pioneering articles provided background as to where LGBT films had come from and where they might go. The readings stimulated my interest and questions relating to curatorial practices and management of LGBT films and the festivals in which they were screened. I participated in the preparation of the Downtown Dayton LGBT Film Festival, balancing the film criticism and theory readings with hands-on application as a curatorial assistant to festival director Jonathan McNeal.¹² This portion of the project included screening films, critiquing through established guidelines, communicating with potential film festival personnel, and information management for the upcoming festival (September 28-30, 2012).¹³ The research project seemed to grow more and more cohesive as I merged ideas from art history with film theory.

Media forms, display and the theories of art are changing and being rethought.¹⁴ The transformation from celluloid into digital film has heightened questions within the motion picture community about curatorial practices and information management.¹⁵ This prompted questions about the history of art and its future. Questions arose, such as how to ensure the archiving of moving images in the same ways as *Gentleman* or permanent gallery collections. A research trip to the Traverse City Film Festival (TCFF) provided an opportunity to discuss the

⁸ Dixon, Wheeler W, and Foster, Gwendolyn A. *Experimental Cinema: The Film Reader*. London: Routledge, p. 1-16.

⁹ Graham, Beryl, and Sarah Cook. *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010.

¹⁰ Rich, B. Ruby. "The New Queer Cinema." Benschoff, Harry M, and Sean Griffin. *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 53-60.

¹¹ Benschoff, Harry M, and Sean Griffin. *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Introduction, p. 1-15.

¹² Festival, The Downtown Dayton LGBT Film. *The Downtown Dayton LGBT Film Festival*. 28-30 September 2012. website, <http://daytonlgbt.com/>. August 2012.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Benschoff and Griffin, p. 1-17.

¹⁵ Lake, D., Moore, M., Cutler, C., Cousins, M., McAllister, S., & Wenders, W. (2012, July & August). The Traverse City Film Festival. (J. Hyatt, Interviewer).

celluloid to digital shift and the future of moving pictures.¹⁶ My readings about film festivals addressed the history of film and their impact on screenings, which directly related to the TCFE experience.¹⁷ Conversations with festival-goers, directors such as Sean McAllister and Mark Cousins and festival giants such as Chapin Cutler allowed for a reflection on the transformation.¹⁸ Recording on-sight observations and learning the structure and approaches to festival planning included an interview with TCFE festival director, Deb Lake.

The discussions of how art is displayed and managed and discussions of its future helped stitch the various parts of the project into a cohesive whole.¹⁹ Based on my research, curatorial practices seemed not to be medium specific.²⁰ Works of art may be displayed, managed, archived, discussed, hated, loved within galleries, libraries, film archives and personal filing systems.²¹ The changes in technology between celluloid and digital media prompted me to reflect on history of art. Historically, works of art have exhibited mark-marking, social history, emotion, process and ideas throughout human existence. However, over time technological developments changed the way in which art was perceived, understood and experienced. This points to the conceptual significance of time and its impact on information regardless of its media. Works of art need time in order to be experienced, appreciated, archived and cataloged. Proper curatorial practices and information management can provide a digital ‘fountain of youth’.²² Digital technology within these fields, exhibits the potential to transform and preserve works of art for future generations.

This mutually beneficial project, explored innovative technological software training through observation, cataloging and hands-on research. Experience with image libraries and film festivals provided by Dr. Huebner, the Visual Resource Center, The Robert and Elaine Stein Gallery and The Downtown Dayton LGBT Film Festival facilitated practical experience in image and information management. Being awarded this valuable Wright State University

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Wong, Cindy H. *Film Festivals: Culture, People, and Power on the Global Screen*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2011, p. 1-64.

¹⁸ Lake, D., Moore, M., Cutler, C., Cousins, M., McAllister, S., & Wenders, W. (2012, July & August). The Traverse City Film Festival. (J. Hyatt, Interviewer).

¹⁹ Rugg, Judith, and Michèle Sedgwick. *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2007, p. 7-10 and Graham, Beryl, and Cook, Sarah.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Bancroft, Hubert H. "Juan Ponce de Leon and the Fountain of Youth." Early 1900's. *The Great Republic by the Master Historians (Vol 1)*. Book excerpt, http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public_html/The_Great_Republic_By_the_Master_Historian_s_Vol_I/juanponce_bg.html. August 2012.

undergraduate research grant created a dynamic learning environment to further academic excellence and provided a platform for a successful research project between multiple departments and the greater Dayton community.

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