



InterPARES 2 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

Characterization of Case Study Validated

Case Study 09(2): Digital Moving Images – National Film Board of Canada

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Relevance of the Case Study to InterPARES 2

The purpose of this case study is to “build a model describing and explaining the processes involved in creating digital moving image products and the by-products resulting from the activities, including occasional analogue elements.”¹ This study aims to identify the digital entities created at each stage of the movie-making process as well as the relationship among the digital entities and to the overall production. The relevance of this case study is to enable InterPARES to reach its goals with respect to the study of artistic activities that are conducted using experiential, interactive and dynamic computer technology.

Information about the Creator

The Creator is the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) established in 1939. The creator is a federal government cultural agency situated within the Canadian Heritage Department. The creator's head office is located in Ottawa, Ontario. However, the creator's operational headquarters are located in Montreal, Quebec and various production centres are located in major cities around Canada.

The creator's mandate is “to produce and distribute distinctive, culturally diverse, challenging and relevant audiovisual works that provide Canada and the world with a unique Canadian perspective.”²

Functions of the creator include facilitating access to NFB films, playing a role in the international film scene, asserting itself as a leader in the areas of film technology, research and development and professional training, and playing a role in Ottawa's national film policy.

The original National Film Act of 1939 stipulated that a Film Commissioner would oversee a small office which supervised Canadian government film activities as performed in various departments. Under the pressure of war the Board undertook its own film creation,

¹ Case Study Proposal, Digital Moving Images: Inputs, Processes and Outputs, p. 1.

² National Film Board of Canada Web site, <http://www.nfb.ca/atonf/organisation.php?idcat=72&v=h&lg=en>.

acquired government production facilities and instituted a distribution network. The Act of 1950 recognized these changes: the Government Film Commissioner also acts as the head of the National Film Board. A Board of Trustees exists consisting of eight members including the Government Film Commissioner, the Executive Director of Telefilm Canada and six other members appointed by the Governor in Council. The NFB is divided into English and French language programmes, which are supported by the following branches: Marketing and Communications; Administration; Distribution; Human Resources; Planning, Program Evaluation and Audit; Business Affairs and Legal Services. Additionally, an executive producer heads each production studio while independent directors make the NFB films. Legislation relevant to the NFB includes the National Film Act of 1950 and Canadian copyright laws in regards to film rights issues and contract laws relating to those collaborating in the films.

Information about the Administrative/Management Function

The NFB creates or aids in the creation of audio-visual productions. Text documents such as correspondence, budgetary reports, contracts, research reports and storylines are among the documents resulting from the Board's activities. Artwork is also produced in the course of creating and promoting films as well as music in the form of scores and recorded music. The creator has a recordkeeping database system known as Synchroné. Synchroné functions as "a centralized knowledge management system presenting all qualitative and quantitative information on an NFB production or co-production in one view."³ The database system contains the entities arising from the creation of film and related supporting documentation including the products of marketing and distributing, the completed film itself and the scanned files of documents such as photographs, music cue sheets, and textual documents. In the late 1990s a financial management system and an electronic rights database management system were developed; other modules have since been formed to form Synchroné.

Information about the Digital Entity Being Studied

The digital entities being studied are the digital animation products and documentation related to production as well as the Synchroné database.⁴ Because most animation at the NFB is done by independent animators who depend on NFB production and technical facilities, they must follow NFB guidelines. However it is evident that NFB attempts to provide individual animators with the widest possible array of tools with which to do their work. Approximately one third of the animators create images directly on the computer while others use either purely analogue methods or a combination of both. The documents resulting from the creation process are stored in the Synchroné database (the image files themselves are stored on the network server until production is complete). The Information Technology Department is responsible for maintaining all servers on which the animation is stored during the course of production, and also for the hardware to allow the digital entities to be retrieved. The current preservation strategy is to copy digital files on to film or write the files to Betamax.

Documentation relating to the creation of animation films are stored in production files within the Synchroné Oracle database. Digital images are stored as TIFF (two dimensional work)

³ Case Study 09(2) Final Report, p. 5.

⁴ The final report states that instead of considering one film and the activities related to its production, an attempt was made to give an overview of the context in which animation is created and is made available over time.

or TARGA (three dimensional work) files. These files are stored on linear digital tape. The production itself is stored as MPEG encoded files. Animators use a variety of hardware and software tools in the creation of animation films such as graphic tablets, electronic pens, Adobe Photoshop and Softimage. All National Film Board staff have access to Synchrone, but access may be limited in action (e.g., read only permission) and/or availability (e.g., access to areas limited by need).