



InterPARES 2 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

Overview

Case Study 10: *The Danube Exodus*

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May 2006

The Creator Context / Activity

Creators: A partnership between the following:

1. Péter Forgács, a filmmaker and artist (private individual).
2. The Hungarian Center for Culture and Communication (C³), an independent, public, non-profit institution. It provides a meeting place for the spheres of art, science and technology.
3. The Getty Research Institute, an operating program of a private foundation dedicated to the visual arts.
4. The Labyrinth Project, a research project of the University of Southern California Annenberg Center for Communication.

Creator type: Artistic focus. Partnership sphere, though at first glance would appear to be in the private sphere. It is actually of mixed status, associating a private individual, a non-profit public agency, a private foundation and a project from a university centre.

Juridical context: All four creators deal with constraints and issues with respect to copyright and intellectual property laws. Forgács and the Labyrinth Project have copyrighted versions of their work in general, but no DVD has been published on the Danube installation, due to the fact that copyright issues (one party charging unaffordable fees for commercial use of footage) have prohibited the installation's publication on DVD. There are also obligations laid upon the creators by funding bodies, and vague ethical restraints, not formulated by any professional body or anything similar.

“*The Danube Exodus* installation and the records documenting it are vulnerable for two reasons. Firstly, because there was no publication of it in DVD form, and therefore there is no definitively “final” or easily distributed version. Secondly, because ownership, legal or physical, of *The Danube Exodus* and its component parts is distributed not only among the institutions who contributed to its creation but also among other institutions that hold the copyright to individual items it utilizes.” (FR 10)

Activity: The creation and display of an interactive multimedia piece as both an installation (at the Getty Research Institute, August 17 – September 29, 2002) and as a Web site. This global activity involved the sub-activities of administration and preparation, video editing, multimedia authoring and the creation of a Web-enabled database.

The interactive multimedia installation is entitled *The Danube Exodus: The Rippling Currents of the River*. It is made up of:

1. A 60-minute video projected onto a large screen.
2. An interactive database listing the materials used in the installation and the film and allowing visitors to record their reactions to the film or personal commentary of relevant/related experiences.
3. An interactive multimedia installation with visual and other material, eighteen video segments and sound recordings presenting three stories.
4. A Web site.

This activity is a new type of artistic expression. The installation was able to incorporate “visual and other material that could not be included in the original film.” (FR 1) The Labyrinth Project is at the forefront of this new type of artistic expression. It “collaborates with writers and filmmakers, such as Forgács, who have not previously worked in the new media realm to create “database narratives,” i.e., works of non-linear story telling whose structure emerges through the choices made by the viewer (cum accomplice) between individual narrative elements, such as characters, images, sounds, events, and settings. Most of these projects are available as published CDs or DVDs.” (FR 3)

Nature of Partnership

“*The Danube Exodus* installation had a complicated provenance.” (FR 2) Each party in the partnership created portions of the digital entity being studied. Although it is unclear which party is the originator of the project, it seems that it was Forgács. “Forgács was the central figure in its creation, collaborating closely with each of the other contributors.” (FR 2); C³, “in consultation with Forgács,” (FR 2) created the documentary databases and Web site; The Getty Research Institute provided text, materials, physical and technical equipment and the gallery space; while the Labyrinth Project, again “in consultation with Forgács,” (FR 2) was responsible for the programming and conceptualization of the interactive multimedia installation.

Ownership (legal and practical) is distributed among those who were involved in the project’s creation and between institutions that hold copyrights to particular parts of the installation. An agreement exists with the Getty to credit the Institute for any text or design ideas it contributed to the installation.

Bureaucratic/Organizational Structure

No formal, written structure exists. It appears to be a form of symbiosis, with each party bringing something to the whole that the others cannot and that the others need. Forgács was the central figure for the creation of content and form of display/interface; C³ was responsible for the documentary database and Web site; The Getty Research Institute was responsible for the 18th century documentation exhibit and the physical installation of the project and the Labyrinth Project was responsible for programming and conceptualizing the interactive multimedia installation and re-installations at other venues. The project manager is said to be from the Labyrinth Project, as well.

Outside of the collaborative context of this project, each partner also operates within a bureaucratic/organizational structure. Forgács is a researcher with the Hungarian Sociological Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Private Film and Photo Research Project. The Getty Research Institute is an operating program of The J. Paul Getty Trust, a private foundation with a Director, Chief Librarian, Associate Director and staff within the following departments: Administration, Research Library, Scholarly and Public Programs and Information Management. The Labyrinth Project is an art collective and research initiative based at the University of Southern California's Annenberg Center for Communication. It is funded by the Annenberg Center, with additional grants from the Rockefeller, Ford and James Irvine Foundations and USC's Provost. It has a project director and staff.

"None of the groups interviewed had rigid workflows or codes of practice, although most had developed a customary way of doing things or a usual creative process. These, however, were flexible, adjusting according to circumstances, such as the needs and abilities of the partner organizations with whom they were collaborating." (FR 4)

Digital Entities Studied

An interactive multimedia installation entitled *The Danube Exodus* and a Web site with interactive space for the installation. Individual entities include:

- Word files
- E-mails
- Interactive pieces for DVD and the Web
- Video and audio files
- Image files
- Databases

Entities are created largely to display, and allow interaction with, the multimedia installation. Others are created to guide the correct display or as a by-product of the creation process, documenting budget, staff, equipment lists, legal relationships, creative and administrative decisions, etc.

Documentary Practices Observed

There is no centralized record management system for *The Danube Exodus* project. Policies, procedures and standards are informal and not always documented with respect to records creation, maintenance and preservation.

Record Creation and Maintenance

The collaborative nature of the project and the competencies of the parties involved dictated the creation **process**. "Generally, the files seemed to emerge from an iterative, collaborative process between Forgács and the other creators." (FR 6) "The creation was divided between the creators according to their skills; for example, Forgács edited all the video segments." (FR 8)

Even though some sort of process existed, it was definitely **informal**. "One could say that the model is artisanal, to the extent that practices are often passed on through personal transmission from one staff member or collaborator to another." (FR 10)

“Generally, the institutions seemed to use a combination of **file naming**, directory structure and individual memory to access files available online through the internal networks, and on backup optical disks.” (FR 7) These processes were largely informal and undocumented. “File naming seemed to be largely *ad hoc*, although some individuals did develop their own system. No alternative attempt to apply **persistent unique identifiers** was noted. Most files were **organized** in folders whose directory structure seemed to follow the intellectual conceptualization of the project.” (FR 6)

“Generally, neither standard, public **metadata** schemas nor ones developed in-house are being used consistently in the environments studied...Forgács does capture metadata in the course of his work, but it is a system largely based on individual need, as informed by standard professional filmmaking practice.” (FR 11)

Regarding the maintaining of versions or **changes** made to the digital entities, the video editing software Final Cut Pro has a feature that stores previous edit decisions; otherwise new versions of files were differentiated by file name. “There is therefore no system in place to track changes, actions or transactions to digital files, beyond renaming by individuals and such strategies, and as far as can be ascertained, none of the subjects employs any kind of digital or media asset management system that could perform similar functions.” (FR 9)

Recordkeeping and Maintenance

“None of the subjects has a formal or automated **recordkeeping system**, though all have some process by which records are kept.” (FR 9) “The priority for the file or records management systems, to the extent that these existed, seemed consistently to be the work or works, or parts thereof...and the work files that could be used to render the work. Secondly, the files that documented how the final installation should look, work, behave were considered important, but were generally not detailed enough to be effective without a human interpreter familiar with the installation. Least important were the administrative files documenting the creation process (meeting agendas, correspondence, etc.), and these were managed only intermittently. Obviously, in this case relevant files are scattered across four different institutions, with no centralization or rationalization.” (FR 6)

The **preservation** of records was left to whatever individual was responsible for a particular part of the project. “All of the subjects held in-house fonds of greater or lesser completeness and formality.” (FR 4) The **practices** of each party include:

1. Forgács makes extensive notes (presumably descriptive) on all his work that he stores, “though he seldom refers to them after a project is finished.” (FR 4) He backs up work onto zip drives and two hard drives and relies on making multiple copies in the hopes that one copy will survive “and that advances in technology might reanimate that copy if it was no longer viable.” (FR 9)
2. C³ noted that it was not wise to leave preservation or maintenance of new media works solely in the hands of the artist. “They considered that neither migration nor emulation was likely to be an effective long-term preservation strategy for multimedia works, though they had adopted it for video works.” (FR 9) They intended to follow the strategy inspired by the Variable Media Network and to “document multimedia works...so thoroughly that it would be possible to re-create or reconstruct them in the future using

the technology of the day, rather than trying to extend the lifetime of the original indefinitely.” (FR 9)

3. Each Getty department stores its own records according to departmental processes. The Exhibition Department holds and stores most of the files created during the course of each exhibition (generally correspondence, planning documents, meeting agendas and the like) and organizes them by exhibition. Records deemed worth keeping are stored on a central drive with tape backup and minimal security, and are periodically backed up to CD. The Getty Research Institute and Labyrinth Project both occasionally saved e-mails as text files.
4. The Labyrinth Project’s practices include publishing and distributing works and maintaining the ability to re-create an installation. There is an in-house file naming protocol. Labyrinth stores work files, rendered files, and some supporting records (depending on the particular project manager), and organizes them by project. All work files are saved, backed up on hard drives and saved to DVD. Migration is used to keep files functional. Projects are backed up onto an archival server with password-protected access, but many administrative records may only be stored on individual’s hard drives, if at all. Specifically in relation to *The Danube Exodus*, the manager of the project made efforts to save supporting documentation by storing documents on a personal hard drive. However, “the incentive of the Labyrinth Project to maintain *The Danube Exodus* is somewhat lessened by their inability to publish it in DVD, which is their primary archival motivator.” (FR 10)

“As regards preservation, all of the subjects except the Getty Research Institute suggested that they simply did not have enough money to adopt a more systematic approach....To give their works a better chance of long-term survival, it seems that policies need to be put in place rather than modified, and that low-cost **preservation strategies** need to be explored. However, these are all creative bodies that are likely not to adapt particularly well to intrusive regulation or anything perceived as too bureaucratic.” (FR 10)

There seems to be no real sense of obligation of **preservation for archival purposes**, but rather as a moral or professional obligation to preserve the work or at least the means to re-create it. Under such a philosophy, no norms or guidelines were used for the appraisal of records, but rather subjective, personal assessment was made of them. “All the subjects stated that they attempted to keep all relevant files, despite only really being concerned about the fate of work files and any secondary files that would allow them to remain functional. What constituted relevant or important files was largely left to the discretion of whatever individual was regarded as responsible for the project; for instance, the project manager at the Labyrinth Project.” (FR 9)

It seems that **storage** of digital entities could be either centralized or decentralized. “Most of the institutions seemed to use a basic network model, where individual staff worked at particular workstations networked to a central server. They were able to save either to their own hard drives or to a shared server, usually to a folder dedicated to each project. Forgács, when not working in another space, may be the exception to this model.” (FR 6)

Accuracy, Authenticity, Reliability

The ideas of oversight and (physical) control of the entities seem to be the overriding—if not the sole—basis for establishing accuracy, authenticity and reliability in this case study:

- “All subjects considered that the fact that files relating to the installation remaining under their own stewardship in more, or less, secure environments was the best guarantee of their authenticity, quality and reliability.” (FR 7)
- For Forgács and Labyrinth, their “working assumption” was that published, copyrighted versions of their work constitute “the definitive and final version, and its authenticity, quality and reliability [is] guaranteed by being able to oversee and control the publication or finalization, and then “stamp” the work with credits and copyright statements.” (FR 7)
- “Personal oversight of the installation and its reinstallations [by Forgács?] seems to be the primary guarantee of quality used.” (FR 7)
- “In the case of the Getty Research Institute, its ability to oversee and control the installation as it appeared at the Getty Center also served as the guarantee of its accuracy, reliability and authenticity. The Getty has not been actively involved in the re-installations, which have not used the materials from the special collections at the Getty Research Library, but seems to trust Forgács and the Labyrinth Project to manifest it appropriately.” (FR 7)

The notion of trust (in individuals, respect of copyright and other legislation, in technical equipment, etc.) seems to play a large role in the notions of accuracy, authenticity and reliability.

Accuracy

“All subjects expressed an ethical obligation to be historically accurate, to the extent that this is possible, while maintaining their own right to be provocative in its exploration. Forgács additionally feels an obligation to...all the people who figure in his films...to represent them fairly, even or perhaps particularly when they are deceased and unable to protest.” (FR 10)

Authenticity

The institutions shared files, but no external users have access to files. “Some files have been shared between institutions, but there seemed a general assumption that these file would not be subject to editing by the receiving institution, even where this was technically possible.” (FR 9)

The database is available on the Internet, but the data cannot be changed.

To the extent that either the works are published or stewardship continues, the creators believe that the authenticity of the entities is assured, “but beyond that, for instance beyond their own life spans, no.” (FR 8)

“Forgács suggested that it (authenticity) was a problem, but it was not his problem—meaning that film historians who examined his files in the future might be concerned as to the authenticity of the files, but that guarding against this was not a high priority for him personally.” (FR 7)

Reliability

Not addressed specifically (or independent of accuracy and authenticity) in the documentation available (Areas that Should be Covered, Characterization, Final Report).