

## Collections Development Officer, Arts and Humanities Data Service – Performing Arts based at HATII, University of Glasgow

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The Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) is a UK national service aiding the discovery, creation and preservation of digital resources in and for research, teaching and learning in the arts and humanities. Currently, it covers five subject areas: archaeology, history, visual arts, literature, languages & linguistics, and performing arts.

AHDS provides services for data creators and depositors, funding and other agencies, and users. Users can free or at-cost access all services for the Higher and Further education communities in the UK (many resources are also made freely available nationwide). They can get expert guidance on the creation and scholarly use of digital materials, professional cataloguing, documentation of digital resources, and information on resource availability and usefulness.

As a digital research archive AHDS have been thinking about ideas of reuse from the viewpoint of creative and performance arts. Over the past year they have been doing research that questions the role of the archive: how to open it up to allow for a more creative reinterpretation of the records. This research centered on representations of performance, considering how you can capture a live event in a way that makes it accessible in the future. One of the key concerns that arose is that performance is an ongoing creative process, so there's not an end point which can easily be defined as the work. The traditional model of archiving in contrast is linear, focusing on static representations. This model suggests there is a single finished product so is inappropriate for performance archives. Can the archive model be adapted to suit the evolving nature of performance by allowing for more mutable records?

How then to open the doors of the archive to encourage more creative engagement and reuse? Artist residencies are an example of how this can be done. Also the cooperation with artists may shed new light on the organization and on the contents of the archive.

Three examples of the work of Ruth McLennan illustrate this. Courtesy of the “artists placements group” of the UK she was artist in residence in the Archives of the London School of Economics. She was given free reign of the archive and was inspired by the (cataloguing) work done at the archive and the archivists: “I became fascinated by the archive itself, the place, and in particular the archivists, as self-styled Gatekeepers and interpreters of the system. The archivists perform the archive: they enact the system and the situation of the archive, but are usually invisible. I wanted to make them a focus of attention. By filming them, I wanted to let them show themselves; interpret their own roles, and be seen.” The residency resulted in a video interview with several members of archive staff discussing the nature of archives and the role of the archivist: *The Gatekeepers*. In 2003 Ruth was commissioned by the Wellcome Trust to make a film on the 50th anniversary of the discovery of DNA: *We saw it — like a flash*, all fragments were taken from the BBC television archive of science programs.

A third example is *Capture*, “This work developed out of research for the film *Valley of Castles (Hunting Eagles)*, in Almaty, Kazakhstan. To make a part of that film I attached a miniature camera to a Kazakh Golden Eagle, which then filmed its own participation in the ancient practice of falconry. *Capture* juxtaposes footage shot on the miniature camera with archival footage of an eagle being captured to be trained for hunting, and then later hunting and killing silver foxes. The archival film was found in the Almaty Film Archives. This work explores relations between the human and captive but still wild animal, and the camera.”

Working with artists like this requires a basis of trust. Also archives will have more work with such initiatives. Or perhaps one should say different work they have to deal with as well, so the organization will have to decide on priorities. For the average user there are still many obstacles for access to the material. You need to register, can only take out so many records per day, etc. Users may think they cannot have access to an archive except for research. The main question that needs to be answered is: What is the role of the archivist: are we keepers of the material or are we there to facilitate re-use? And if we're both, how do we define and maintain a balance between the two?

