



Safeguarding digital telecinematic history and culture

**Archiving film and television
visual effects records**

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Safeguarding digital telecinematic history and culture: Archiving film and television visual effects records

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the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

under the supervision of Professor Andrew Johnston and
Professor Elise van den Hoven

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Certificate of original authorship

I, Evanthia Samaras declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, School of Computer Science and Animal Logic Academy at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Table of contents

Certificate of original authorship	i
Acknowledgement	ii
List of tables	vi
List of figures	vii
List of abbreviations	viii
Abstract	ix
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Topic	1
1.2 Definitions	1
1.3 Overview	4
1.4 Aim and objectives	6
1.5 Stakeholders	8
1.6 Significance	10
1.7 Summary of methodology	11
1.8 Thesis structure	13
2 Literature review	15
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 The significant and ongoing problem of preserving film and television heritage	16
2.3 The role and importance of archiving	25
2.4 The value of visual effects: An essential feature of film and television	38
2.5 Challenges and conditions for archiving visual effects	48
2.6 Conclusion	56
3 Research methodology	57
3.1 Introduction	57
3.2 Interpretivist paradigm: the underpinning philosophy	60
3.3 Inclusive research design framework: Guiding principles	63
	iii

3.4	Research methods: Mixed approaches for doing and structuring the research	65
3.5	Research techniques: Tools to collect, analyse and reflect	80
3.6	Quality and ethics of the research methodology	93
3.7	Conclusion	95
4	Visual effects records management, archiving and collecting	97
4.1	Introduction	97
4.2	Current state of records management and archiving in the visual effects industry	98
4.3	Inclusion of visual effects in film and television heritage collections	130
4.4	Records to keep as visual effects archives	146
4.5	Conclusion	151
5	Appraisal model and relevant practices	153
5.1	Introduction	153
5.2	Appraisal model of visual effects archives	153
5.3	Relevant library, archive and museum practices for archiving visual effects	160
5.4	Conclusion	170
6	Recommendations to improve visual effects archiving	172
6.1	Introduction	172
6.2	Recommendation 1: Work with archivists and records managers	172
6.3	Recommendation 2: Undertake holistic appraisal of records	173
6.4	Recommendation 3: Use sustainable formats	174
6.5	Recommendation 4: Implement standardised metadata	175
6.6	Recommendation 5: Implement migration plans for legacy tape formats	176
6.7	Recommendation 6: Work with LAMs to donate records and develop oral histories	177
6.8	Conclusion	177
7	Discussion	179
7.1	Introduction	179
7.2	Summary of research findings and outcomes	180
7.3	Interpretations	185
7.4	Implications	188
7.5	Limitations and future work	190
7.6	Conclusion	191
8	Conclusion	192

9	References	195
10	Appendices	214
10.1	Appendix A: Glossary of terms	214
10.2	Appendix B: Visual effects company questionnaire	220
10.3	Appendix C: Studio questionnaire	224
10.4	Appendix D: Dublin Core and RMPS metadata schemas	225
10.5	Appendix E: Research publications and presentations	227

List of tables

Table 1.1 Research stakeholders	8
Table 2.1 Metadata fields used to describe a fictional asset in Warehouse	36
Table 3.1 Implementation of IRD principles in the research	64
Table 3.2 Mixed methods to support the research objectives	65
Table 3.3 Techniques to support the research objectives	81
Table 3.4 Advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires	82
Table 3.5 Summary of the VFX practitioner research interviews	84
Table 3.6 Application of value criteria to research	94
Table 4.1 Summary of Company A	111
Table 4.2 Example asset metadata captured	112
Table 4.3 Summary of Company B	114
Table 4.4 Summary of Company C	117
Table 4.5 Summary of Company D	120
Table 4.6 Summary of Company E	123
Table 4.7 Summary of Company F	125
Table 4.8 Summary of Studio A	129
Table 4.9 LAM VFX collections	131
Table 4.10 Academy Museum of Motion Pictures Exhibitions	133
Table 5.1 Metadata tools used for film and TV collections	169
Table 10.1 Metadata terms in Dublin Core and RMPRS	225

List of figures

Figure 1.1 Still from <i>EX MACHINA</i>	3
Figure 1.2 Overview of the research methodology	12
Figure 2.1 Video formats	20
Figure 2.2 Movie elements for archiving	25
Figure 2.3 Promotional image for <i>KING KONG</i>	39
Figure 2.4 Still from <i>GRAVITY</i>	44
Figure 3.1 The research methodology in practice	59
Figure 3.2 Research ontology, epistemology and paradigm	61
Figure 3.3 Dual imperatives of action research	68
Figure 3.4 Multiple and nested case studies	79
Figure 3.5 Interview process	85
Figure 3.6 Participation continuum in observation	86
Figure 3.7 Three facets of autoethnography	92
Figure 4.1 VFX workflow from pre to post-production	99
Figure 4.2 Socio-technical VFX network	102
Figure 4.3 Australian Recordkeeping Metadata Schema Business Conceptual Model	103
Figure 4.4 Screen capture from the Deutsche Kinemathek website about their objects collection	136
Figure 4.5 Eye catalogue entry for <i>SNACKBAR</i> film's VFX records	138
Figure 4.6 Screen capture of 'Visual Effects' page on the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art website	141
Figure 4.7 Themes and example records to keep as VFX archives	147
Figure 5.1 Appraisal model of VFX archives	154
Figure 5.2 Records Continuum Model	155
Figure 5.3 The three layers of the VFX archives appraisal model	156
Figure 5.4 Layer 1 of the appraisal model	157
Figure 5.5 Layer 2 of the appraisal model	158
Figure 5.6 Layer 3 of the appraisal model	159
Figure 7.1 Overview of VFX records and archiving	180
Figure 7.2 Hypothetical rendering of a VFX asset record being displayed within a museum	189

List of abbreviations

CG	Computer-generated
CGI	Computer-generated imagery
DCC	Digital content creation
LAM	Library, archive and museum
LTO	Linear tape-open
SFX	Special effects
TV	Television
VES	Visual Effects Society
VFX	Visual effects
VR	Virtual reality

Abstract

Over recent decades, digital visual effects (VFX) have evolved into a global industry and have become an integral component of modern film and television (TV) production practice and telecinematic discourse. In pursuit of guiding audiences into new visual storytelling domains, studios engage with VFX companies to create computer-generated imagery (CGI)—digital animations, visual spectacles and seamless composites produced via complex, global production pipelines of people, code and machinery.

This thesis presents the findings of an inclusive study with the film and TV VFX industry to investigate their records and current archiving practices. It reveals that VFX companies do not presently hire records and archives specialists and subsequently, have insufficient recordkeeping and archiving policy and practices in place. The research findings also show that there is a lack of consistency from studios about the types and formats of records they require, and a need to conduct holistic appraisal within VFX companies to identify records of continuing value that extend beyond production outputs. In addition, this research demonstrates that there is deficient representation of digital VFX in film and TV cultural heritage organisations' collection policies and holdings.

This research proposes that improvements, which align to archival theory and methods, and established library, archive, and museum (LAM) practices should be adopted to assist the industry in archiving their records more effectively. In aid of this proposal, the research presents an appraisal model (a visual diagram that depicts functions, records and domains associated with VFX archives), as well as six recommendations to improve current VFX archiving practices. It does so to support industry recordkeeping and production business activities and facilitate the formation of VFX archive collections. This will help ensure that valuable evidence of VFX production—records about the technologies, artistic process and working life of an important, yet unsung field of film and TV practitioners—is preserved over time for future generations.