



# Self-archiving and preservation – artists' perspectives

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## Brief background to my role:

- Arts and Humanities Data Service (AHDS) – Performing Arts centre, until March 2008.
- Continuation funding to maintain engagement with performance community in UK
  - Encourage use of AHDS-PA website: Info Papers, Guides to Good Practice, Case Studies and the preserved outputs of PA-related research
  - **Survey of UK performance practitioners**
- 2008 – present: various EU and JISC funded digital preservation projects

## JISC 'Incremental' project

- To improve how university researchers manage their own data
- Based on user requirements
- Scoping study findings available at: <http://tiny.cc/IncrementalStudy>
- Delivering guidance, training and openly available online training materials
- Find out more:
  - Search online for JISC Incremental
  - Blog: <http://incrementalproject.wordpress.com>
  - Twitter: JISCincremental

## Aims:

- Establish the extent of awareness of preservation issues in UK performance practitioners
- Companion study to Daisy Abbott & Emma Beer's 'Getting to Know Our Audience', 2006 AHDS-PA Scoping Study - approach similar but not exactly identical
- Priority: to collect responses to specified set of questions, but other emerging themes also noted

## Scope:

- Respondents: UK-based performance practitioners (of any nationality)
- Respondents not funded by HE-sector funding bodies, at least for majority of practice

## Method:

- Small sample – proposed 12–15 responses.
- Face to face interviews where possible, audio-recorded with informed consent. Survey webpage for exceptions only
- Questions modelled on Abbott & Beer 2006 AHDS-PA study

## Constraints:

- Limited funding
- No money to offer respondents, who are often self-employed
- Time

## What I haven't done:

- Expanded the survey
- Set survey into theoretical framework

## The questions:

- 21 questions, all responses recorded
- 4 sections:
  - Your work
  - Preservation of your work
  - Your use of archives
  - General remarks
- Respondents can raise themes

## Findings to date:

### Section 1 – ‘Your work’:

- Respondents include representatives of the following professions:  
Actors, producers, musicians, directors, live artists, film makers, playwrights, choreographers, radio presenters, performance artists, dancers, set designers, composers, scriptwriters, singers.
- Over 90% self-fund their work.

## Findings to date:

### Section 2 – ‘Preservation of Your Work’

- 64% said they planned to keep their outputs ‘forever’ / rest of their life
- 82% in favour of their preserved work being available for use by other practitioners and researchers

Yet:

- 64% equate preservation with documentation
- 18% aware of erosion of preservation media over time
- 9% aware of preservation as an active process

## Findings to date:

### Section 2 – ‘Preservation of Your Work’ cont.

- What is an archive?
  - 9% included accessibility as necessary
- What is a digital archive?
  - 82% addressed accessibility – usually specifically through internet
- Should all performance practitioners preserve their work? Top 3 responses:
  - Yes to make a resource that the practitioner, as well as the public, can return to (55%)
  - Yes because the value of work changes over time (27%)
  - Yes, but ephemerality has its value (18%)

## Findings to date:

### Section 2 – ‘Preservation of Your Work’ cont.

- How do you preserve your own work? Top 3 responses:
  - make and store multiple copies of digital files (back ups) (64%)
  - store digital audio files on hard drive or CD/DVD (64%)
  - keep things ‘in cardboard box in the house’ (55%)
- 27% saw re-performing or exhibiting work as a method of preservation
- 27% view archivist as curator of collection / with creative role in selection
- Each performance practitioner archiving their own work, or archived in dedicated central resource, or both?
  - 9% central resource only
  - 91% want both

} main reason – service of professional archivist

## Findings to date:

### Section 3 – ‘Your Use of Archives’

University libraries, Myspace, British Library, BBC archive, Scottish Screen archive, BFI, Local library (not university), Various online radio archives, Flickr, Live Art Development Agency ([www.thisisliveart.co.uk](http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk)), Arts Admin ([www.artsadmin.co.uk](http://www.artsadmin.co.uk)), Bildwechsel Hamburg ([www.ilovebildwechsel.org](http://www.ilovebildwechsel.org)), Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center NYC, MOMA library NYC, British Film Council catalogue (database, not clips), Artquest, Ubuweb (<http://ubu.com>), Lux Online ([www.luxonline.org.uk](http://www.luxonline.org.uk)), National Film and TV School ([www.nftsfilm-tv.ac.uk](http://www.nftsfilm-tv.ac.uk)), Columbia University NYC, Smithsonian collection Washington DC, Online DVD rental service, Various online message boards / fora.

- Where are the lines between services, libraries, collections, and archives?

## Findings to date:

### Section 3 – ‘Your Use of Archives’ cont.

- 55% use online resources 1/week or more
- Most useful sorts of materials (all wanted by 64%):
  - Bibliographies relevant to particular subjects
  - Searchable raw materials: text (e.g. play scripts)
  - Analytical or interpretative material (e.g. articles on aspects of performance)
  - Integrated resources (e.g. text with images, musical scores with recordings)
  - Materials documenting the final performance or product (e.g. a digital film, or a video of a dance)
- Use of digital resources not online for research
  - Borrow / receive copies of other practitioners' work on CD, DVD (55%)
  - Commercially available CDs / DVDs (55%)

## Findings to date:

### Section 3 – ‘Your Use of Archives’ cont.

### Collections performance practitioners would like to access but can't:

Sam Wagstaff photographic collection (J Paul Getty museum); Video of works of Pina Bausch; Easily searchable access to live art documentation held by major galleries, e.g. Tate Modern and Smithsonian; Respondent's own early work; ‘Adagio’: film by (Bournemouth?) students; Collection of film makers talking about their work; Work from BBC Archive Online; access to 1920s-1950s era film (as shown at BFI screenings); Back issues of some journals; Back issues of underground 'zines; Back issues of American underground comics; Chantelle Ackerman's film work; Archive of Poland's Łódź film school.

## Findings to date:

### Section 4 – ‘Any Other Feedback’

#### To finish: some quotes:

“I see the computer as a box that holds stuff, like traditional idea of an archive.”

“I'm a total digital kid, but I work with old formats [such as cassette tape] because I like the tension of obsolescence, that balance, with things slipping away. And a lot of it is the tactility of it, the fact I can grab the tape loop as it's going around and pull on it. You can do things with your hands that you can't do with digital files, even though they've made controllers like Kaoss Pads ... I like the fact it decays. There's no way you can make your MP3 files decay over multiple plays. So I'm very drawn to that as an aesthetic source.”

“I think it's important to use archives or material pertaining to fields other than my own. These materials influence my work more than consulting other works from my own field.”

## Findings to date:

### Section 4 – ‘Any Other Feedback’, cont.

“Systems for digital preservation are more science- and humanities-orientated, and are not generally suitable for the arts and for use by artists.”

**(Performance practitioner with day job in digital preservation)**

“It's important to separate preservation and dissemination, when archiving the performing arts.”

“An online archive is very good for accessibility, but it should have a physical building too, to enable users to encounter each other, to build a community and to hold events related to the archive holdings.”

“You can download an album, but you can't download being at a gig.”



Thank you for listening.

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