Digital Materiality: Preserving Access to Computers as Complete Environments

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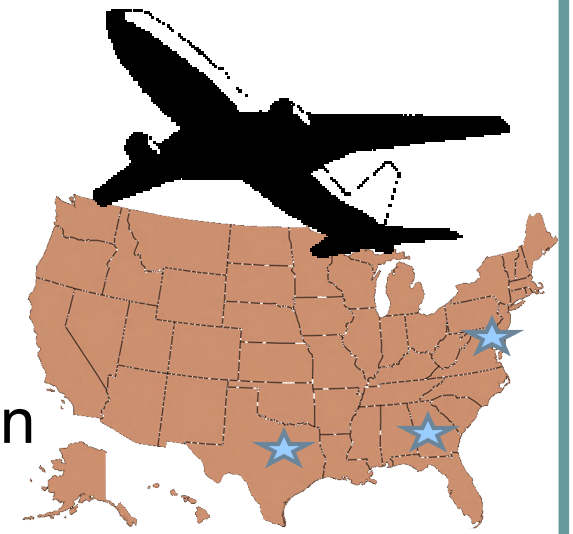
Literary Personal (Digital) Papers

- Creative content originators constitute a unique sub-group
- Challenges and opportunities of literary personal papers
- Hybrid collections
- Urgency: Recent deaths of David Foster Wallace, John Updike

NEH Project

- Office of Digital Humanities
- Sept.-Dec. 2008
- Three Site Visits
  - MITH at University of Maryland
  - Harry Ransom Center at UT Austin
  - Emory University
- Team composed of Archivists, Digital Humanities specialists, Information science specialists, Scholars with subject expertise
- White Paper



MITH at Maryland

- A working digital humanities center
- Textual Scholarship
- Preserving Virtual Worlds
- Deena Larsen Collection
- Jonathan Larson at Library of Congress

Harry Ransom Center

- Humanities research library and literary collecting archives at the University of Texas at Austin
- 39 digital-analog hybrid collections (and counting)
- Since 2005, all or part of the electronic records in the John Crowley, Michael Joyce, Norman Mailer, Terrence McNally, Leon Uris, and Arnold Wesker collections have been processed
- Next steps: adopt forensic techniques as part of processing methodology, build relationships with other digital archivists and digital curators on campus

HRC

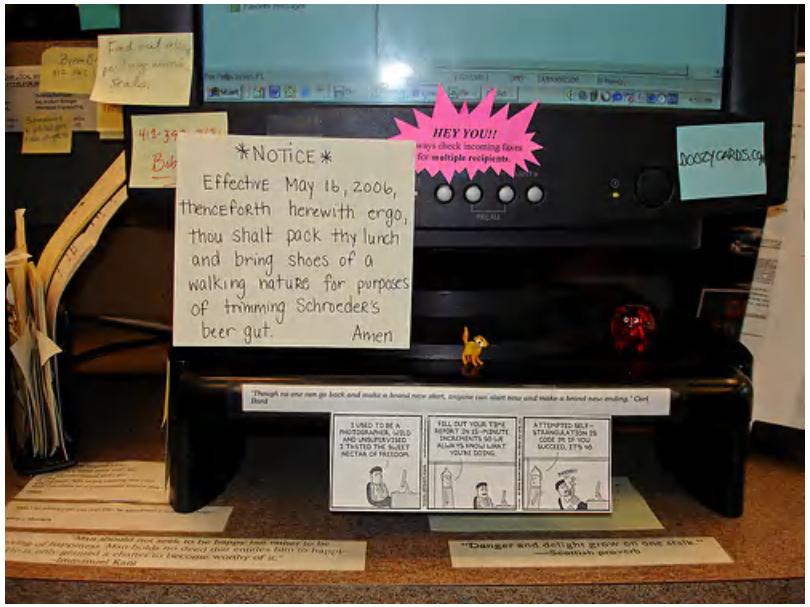
HARRY RANSOM
HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTER
The University of Texas at Austin

Emory Libraries

- Rushdie's computers, and other hybrid collections
- February 2010 release
- Born-Digital Archives Program

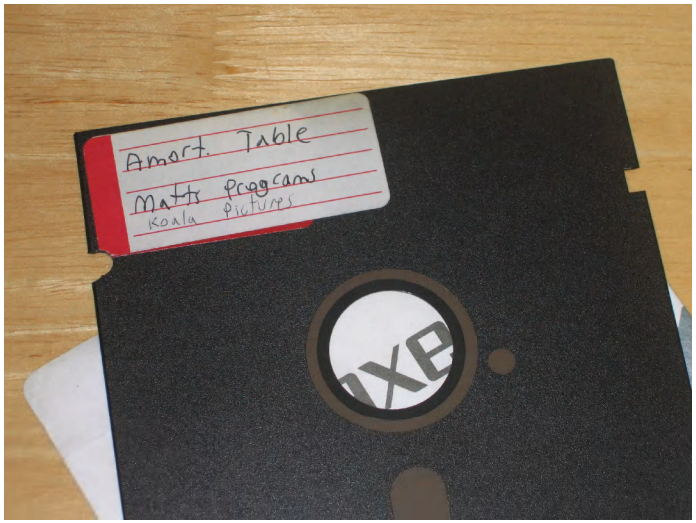
Digital Materiality

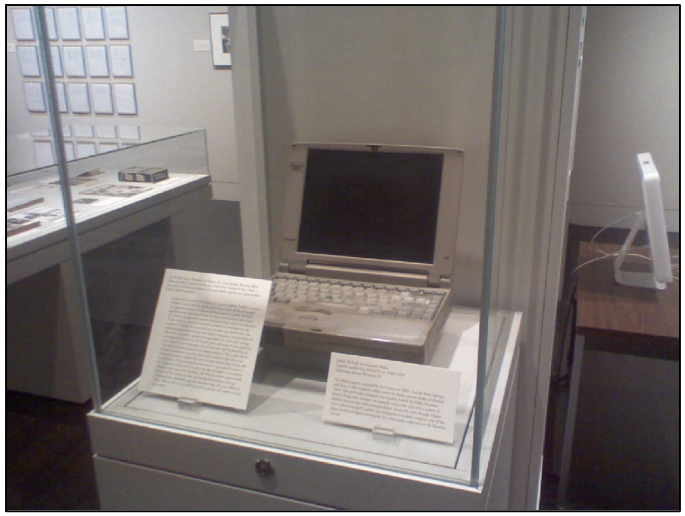
- Digital objects are *artifacts*, not records
- Physical *and* virtual materiality



Recommendation: Hardware and Storage Media

- Evidentiary Value
- Numinous Objects



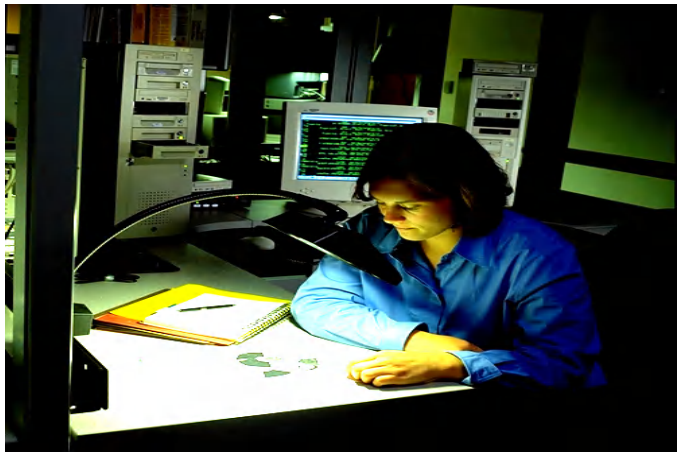


Recommendation: Disk Imaging

- Emerging standard in a nascent field
- Preserving comprehensive systems for future scholarship and research
- Capturing the digital “peripherals”
- Advantages of bit-level capture
- Security and privacy challenges
- Sustainability concerns

Recommendation: Computer Forensics

- Data Recovery
- Hashing and Authentication
- Digital Signatures
- *Computer Forensics and Born-Digital Content in Cultural Heritage Collections* (forthcoming CLIR/Mellon report)



Recommendation: Documenting the Original Environment

- Not only capturing the complete *digital* context
- The machines as artifacts themselves
- Computer nexus of the creative process

Recommendation: Interviews

- Engaging with content creators to reveal details about composition habits and personal computing habits
- Benefits of dialogue between archives and donors, or potential donors
- Opportunity for (mutual) education
- Issues of intervention

Recommendation: Interface Development

- Challenges of marrying donor needs with those of the researcher
- Effectively representing hybrid archives
- Identifying and serving unique needs of researchers accessing born-digital and hybrid archives
- Addressing sustainability and maintenance

Recommendation: Scholarly Communication Needs

- Citation
- Reproduction
- Copyright
- Educate scholars in use of born-digital sources as scholarly evidence

Thank You

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"Approaches to Managing and Collecting Born-Digital Literary Materials for Scholarly Use." Available online from NEH Office of Digital Humanities: http://www.neh.gov/ODH