Overcoming Obstacles to Sketching the Design of Collections with Rhetorical Purpose

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ABSTRACT
This research project addresses the design process for creating knowledge organization schemes and presents novel means of supporting the sketching of collections. Based on a recent experience designing a digital media collection using the Open Video Digital Library Toolkit, this research analyzes the two major obstacles encountered in sketching collections.

Keywords
Sketching, design, collection, information systems, and digital libraries.

INTRODUCTION
Rhetoric is the art of effective or persuasive argument. Feinberg (2008) demonstrated that collections could convey a rhetorical stance. According to Feinberg, not only do information systems show traces of an intellectual perspective, these information systems can be created as an original expression like other intellectual works (Feinberg, 2007). In that work Feinberg went on to assert that classification schemes can in fact be designed.

This research project addresses the design process for creating knowledge organization schemes put forth by Feinberg (2010) and expands upon one of her design activities to support the sketching of collections. Based on a recent design experience applying Feinberg’s process to the creation of a digital media collection using the Open Video Digital Library Toolkit, this research analyzes the two major obstacles encountered.

Although Feinberg does not explicitly state the utility of this process for the design of collections, there is no structural quality of her process that precludes modification to enable collection creators to enjoy a fuller design language for expression. Thus, this design process could be of great utility to the scholarly communities interested in collections.

COLLECTIONS
Knowledge organization schemes and information systems, Feinberg’s preferred terms, are, at their simplest, conduits for the creation and presentation of collections of information resources. This project is concerned with the initial creation of collections, which involves three facets of work. Selection involves choosing existing items to include in the collection. Arrangement, a term carrying connotations of spatial layout, here means the placement of collection items within the presentation environment. Description, the least visual of the three, involves the use of metadata, cataloging, tags and other more narrative structures such as abstracts to give an account of the object’s characteristics.

SKETCHING COLLECTIONS
Feinberg’s design process is a series of design activities. Each one is a formulated mixture of design techniques and methodologies tailored to the design of knowledge organization schemes. The focus of this research project is limited to sketching, which is a rich practice that is essential to any understanding of design (Goldschmidt, 1991). Feinberg (2010) describes the sketching design activity, thusly: “once a number of source concepts have been gathered, the designer begins ‘sketching’ categories and defining potential hierarchical and associative relationships. These sketches map out a potential knowledge organization infrastructure to support the user interactions [...] and the rhetorical goals” (p. 5).

Obstacles to Sketching Collections
As an exercise, Feinberg’s process was applied to the design of a digital media collection. The Open Video Digital Library toolkit was used as a prototyping environment. Completing that exercise, it became clear that for the design process to facilitate the conveyance of rhetorical purpose through collection design that the “Sketching” design activity must clarify how to overcome two major obstacles encountered. These are 1) translating the tradition of sketching from visual design in order to capture the emerging collection’s selection, arrangement, and description and 2) integrating all three of these facets into an iterative sketching framework through which the design emerges.
Feinberg’s description demonstrates that the design of collections requires a highly non-visual conception of sketching. The object of the sketch is divorced from the physical world. It is clear that sketching is a critical method and thought process through which a design is wrought. It is not clear, however, based on Feinberg’s description how this is meant to be achieved in practice. Furthermore, there is not sufficient scholarship supporting the designer's transition from sketching the visual to sketching the non-visual. To conceive of a future in which the “design space” of collection-based entities (e.g., information systems and digital libraries) expands to allow for crafting distinct intellectual statements, tools to facilitate the design of collections in all of their constituent facets are needed.

**COLLECTION SKETCHING FRAMEWORK (CSF)**

The three user interfaces described below are intended to extend the Open Video Digital Library Toolkit to facilitate sketching collections (see Figure 1). The collection designer will move through the interfaces progressively shaping the collection’s rhetorical stance. The framework’s interfaces will be used through multiple iterations of collection sketching. As future extensions of this work prototyping and implementation of the collection sketching framework (CSF) is underway. Evaluation will follow.

Using interface 1 the designer can sketch the initial selection and arrangement of the collection. With a drag-and-drop style interaction the designer can select from candidate items and place them in the selection box. The items in the selection box are repositionable. A rough arrangement can be hewn through grouping selections as the designer wishes.

Interface 2 reframes the sketching activity to focus on the arrangement and description of the collection. The left side of the interface allows the designer to sketch descriptive categories for the collection. A variety of types of description can be sketched: a) a hierarchical structure for the sketching of cataloging terms, b) a flat structure for sub-collections, categories, and descriptions, and c) a flat structure of tag descriptors. The right panel of the second interface allows the arrangement of the selected items into sub-collections. An arrow suggests how the designer might drag an item from the top space into one of many groups.

Interface 3 allows the designer to sketch how those descriptive elements captured in interface 2 would apply to the initial selection. The designer may de-select items in light of the emerging operational image of the collection coming into view. Any selected item can have descriptors applied to it. When an item is selected its description is displayed in the preview window, denoted with a dashed outline. The designer can sketch how they might apply they descriptive elements, as they exist at that moment in the design process.

**CONCLUSION**

In order to conceive of a design language that allows collections to convey, by intention of the designer, not merely imply original expression, in their construction, tools are needed to facilitate the design of the collections in which all of the facets of collections reinforce the design argument being made. More broadly, this research project is related to a trend in scholarship that translates design methods and techniques to the creation of collections of information resources.

**REFERENCES**


