

Revisiting Historical Source Information

Joseph Busch



Arnold Nesselrath and Joseph Busch. Census of Antique Art & Architecture Known to the Renaissance demo, circa 1993.

The original paper

- ❖ J.A. Busch. “Use of a Relational Database System to Model the Variability of Historical Source Information.” In: *Cognitive Paradigms in Knowledge Organization: Second International ISKO Conference*. Madras, 26-28 August 1992. Organised by Madras Library Association, Sarada Ranganathan Endowment for Library Science, University of Madras. First published August 1992. Available at:
<http://www.taxonomystrategies.com/presentations/Busch-Model%20Variability%20of%20Historical%20Source%20Information-Busch-1992.pdf>.

Topics

- ❖ The paper's sources, and new sources – how historical and information science discourse has changed and not changed.
- ❖ Issues and considerations raised in the paper and what they mean today.

1991 sources explored characteristics of humanities information seeking

- ❖ Tibbo (1991): Primary source materials, proper names, organization using various heuristics (e.g., chronology, topic, etc.), and spatial metaphors.
- ❖ Case (1991): Focus on physical arrangement of documents, use of cards and lists, detailed chronologies, but reliance on memory.
- ❖ Schmitt (1988): Importance of visual materials and source documents, files, catalogs and cross-indexing.
- ❖ Siegfried and Wilde (1990): Searching on proper names and “panning for gold” in a large collection.
- ❖ Wiberley and Jones (1989): Geographic and genealogical approaches, and working directly with archivists.
- ❖ Bates (1989): “Area scanning” by broad categories of large collections leading to serendipitous discoveries.
- ❖ Thaller (1991): Quantitative and textual information and hypertext.

Post modernism to post modernity

- ❖ “The past and history float free of each other, they are ages and miles apart. For the same object of enquiry can be read differently by different discursive practices (landscape can be read/interpreted differently by geographers, sociologists, historians, artists, economists, etc.) whilst, internal to each, there are different interpretive readings over time and space; as far as history is concerned historiography shows this.”
 - Postmodernism and history – K. Jenkins. *Rethinking History*, 1991
- ❖ “Digital history might be understood broadly as an approach to examining and representing the past that works with the new communication technologies of the computer, the internet network, and software systems.”
 - D. Seefeldt and W. G. Thomas. “What Is Digital History?” *Perspectives on History*. AHA (May 2009) <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/may-2009/intersections-history-and-new-media/what-is-digital-history>.

Reflections on digital history and art history ... and new journals

- ❖ B. Zweig. “Forgotten genealogies: Brief reflections on the history of digital art history.” *International Journal for Digital Art History*, Issue 1, 2015, pp. 39-49.
- ❖ P. Fletcher. “Reflections on Digital Art History”. *Re-Views: Field Editors’ Reflections*, caa.reviews. College Art Association, 2015. <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/2726>
- ❖ *International Journal for Digital Art History*, 2015- <http://www.dah-journal.org/>
- ❖ *Journal of the Association of History and Computing*, 1998-2010. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jahc/browse.html>

History repeats itself... and persists

- ❖ Getty Foundation. Digital Art History Initiative, 2014-
<http://www.getty.edu/foundation/initiatives/current/dah/index.html>
- ❖ The Census of Antique Works of Art and Architecture Known in the Renaissance. <http://www.census.de/census>

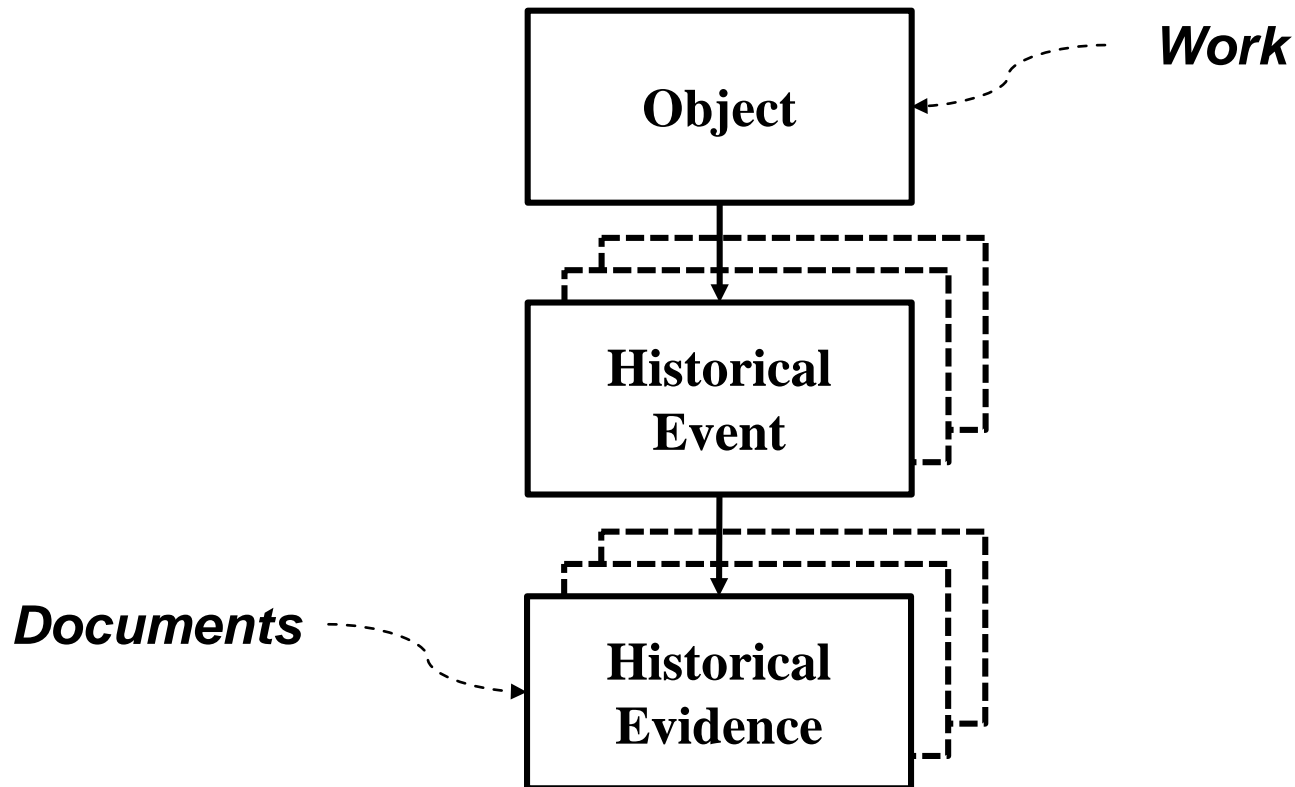
Issues and considerations

- ❖ Preserving the context of so-called source documents and commentary
- ❖ Enabling longitudinal documentation of Works*
- ❖ Documenting creator and date for every entry
- ❖ Documenting Named Entities similarly to Works
- ❖ Providing URI's for Named Entities and Works

* The use of multiple time-based classifications might be called a “longitudinal” documentation, after the term used to describe surveys which involve observations of variables over time.

Generic historical events conceptual model

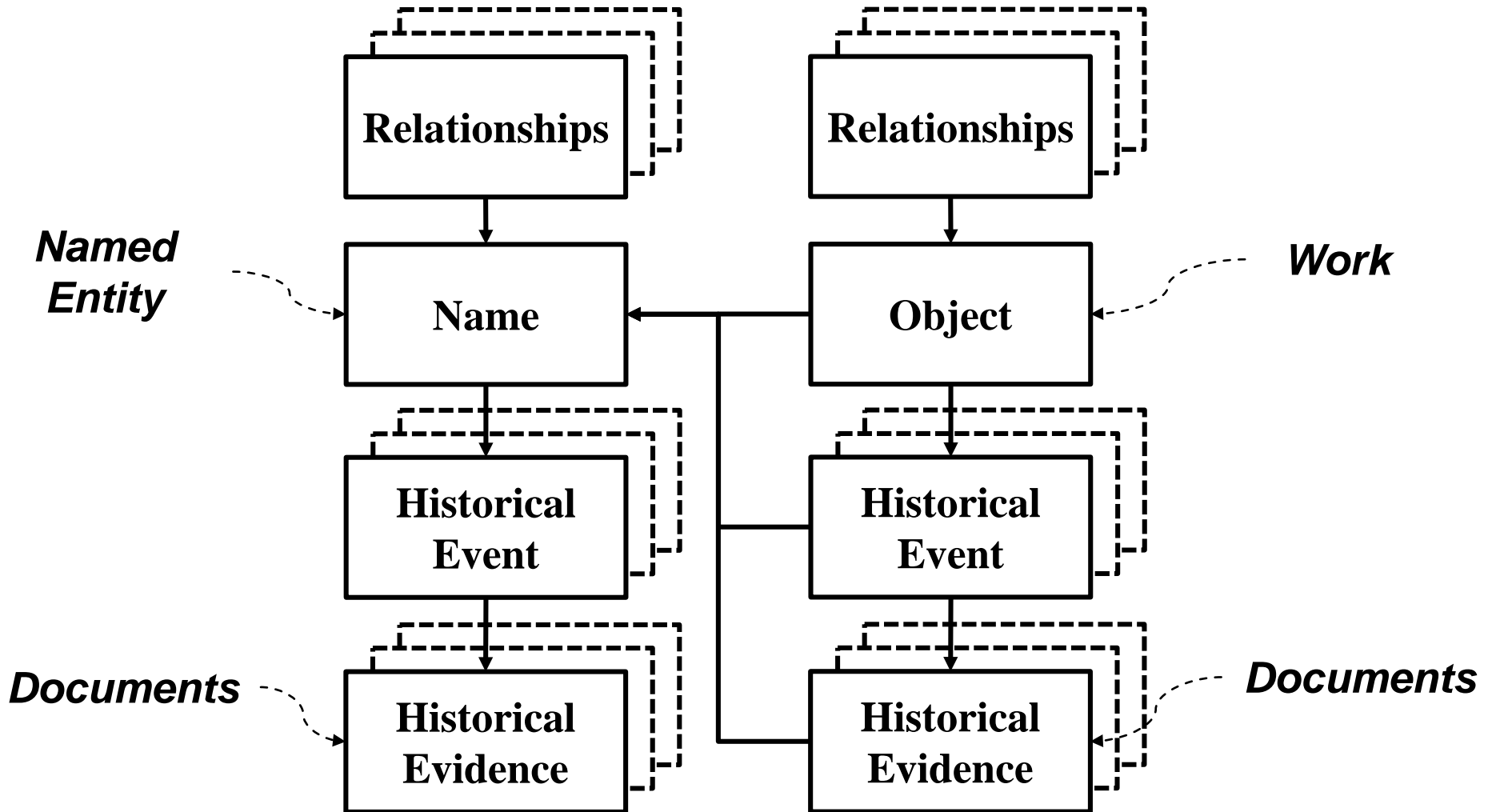
- ❖ Diagram illustrating that one or more Events may be associated with an object (Work) which is documented by one or more items of historical evidence (Documents).



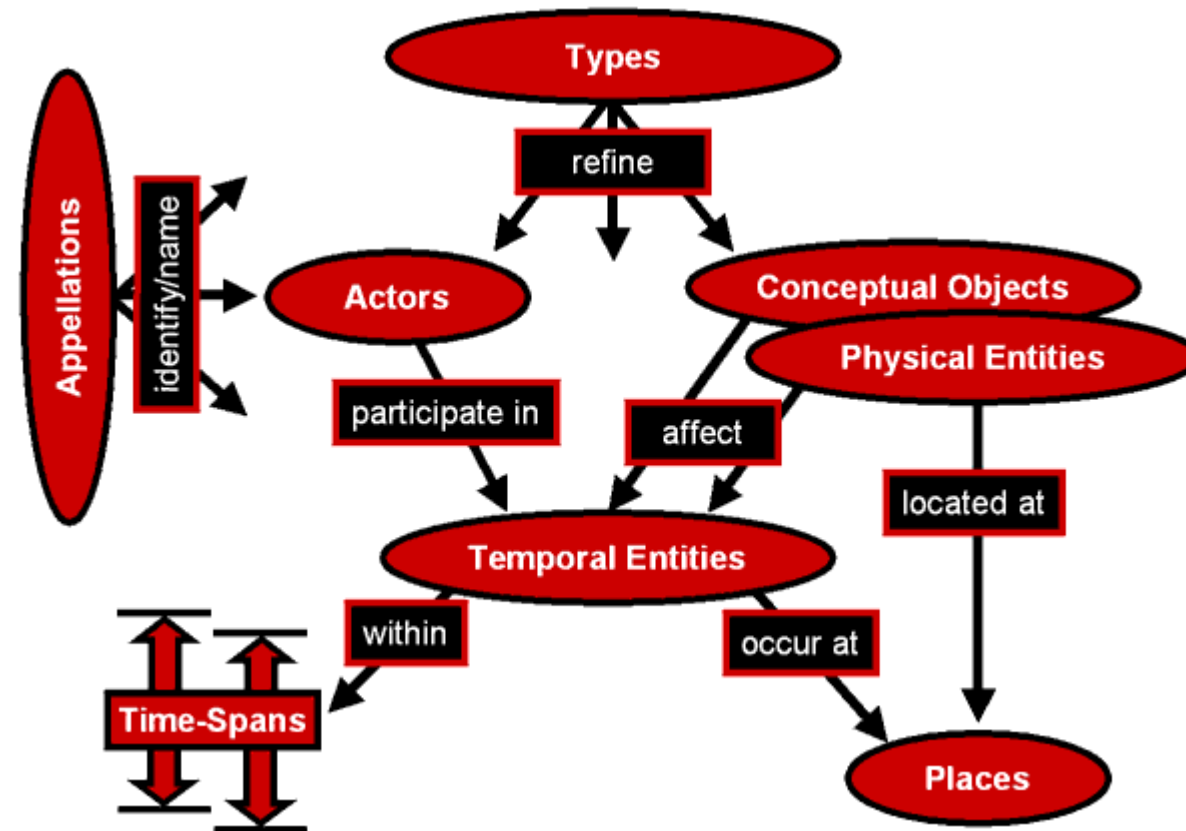
Key features of the Getty conceptual model

- ❖ Extensive use of proper **names** controlled vocabularies (a.k.a. authority files)
- ❖ Concerned with the collecting of **evidence** or documentary materials relating to Works (objects)
- ❖ Expressing the **relationships** between information about the Works.
- ❖ **Decomposition** of source materials to record the implicit relationships hidden within the source materials so that they could be accessed and used to navigate among them.
- ❖ Application to **multiple domains**.

Census and Witt conceptual models



CIDOC Conceptual Reference Model (ISO 21127:2006)



Questions?

- ❖ Joseph Busch, jbusch@taxonomystrategies.com, @joebusch

References

- ❖ M.J. Bates, "The Design of Browsing and Berrypicking Techniques for the Online Search Interface," 13, 5 (*Online Review*) 1989, pp. 407-424.
- ❖ D.O. Case, "Conceptual Organization and Retrieval of Text by Historians: the Role of Memory and Metaphor," 42, 9 (*Journal of the American Society for Information Science*) 1991, pp. 657-668.
- ❖ M. Schmitt, general editor, *Object, Image, Inquiry: the Art Historian at Work*, Santa Monica, Calif., Getty Art History Information Program, 1988.
- ❖ S.L. Siegfried and D.N. Wilde, "Scholars go online," (*Art Documentation*) Fall 1990, pp. 139-141.
- ❖ M. Thaller, "The Historical Workstation Project," 25 (*Computers in the Humanities*) 1991, pp. 149-162.
- ❖ H.R. Tibbo, "Information Systems and Services, and Technology for the Humanities," 26 (*Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*) 1991, pp. 287-346.
- ❖ S.E. Wiberley, Jr. and William G. Jones, "Patterns of Information Seeking in the Humanities," 50 (*College and Research Libraries*) November 1989, pp. 640-641.

Abstract

- ❖ This paper revisits a paper written in 1992 about the Getty system for modeling the variability of historical source information. It reconsiders and updates research on the cognitive process of inquiry and methods used by historians to organize information. The paper also considers the progress and lack of progress in applying longitudinal methods to information system design, especially in the context of classification.

Abstract

- ❖ Traditional documentation and classification systems are designed to organize collections and reflect the perspective of a place and time. As perspectives change, either the documentation and classification is changed, or they are left in place and only current and future acquisitions to the collection are documented and classified using updated methods and schemes. The later process is sometimes called “superimposition”, the term used by libraries when this method was applied to facilitate changes in name authority records prior to the implementation of AACR2 by the Library of Congress in 1981. Documentation systems are not usually designed to hold multiple classification instances for the same item, and to identify them by their historical context. The use of multiple time-based classifications might be called a “longitudinal” documentation, after the term used to describe surveys which involve observations of variables over time.