Beginning a Search

I chose to compare the websites for Northeast Historic Film and National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA). Initially, I searched for "Kodacolor," and "lenticular color" hoping to find examples of items filmed in Kodacolor or another lenticular process. Later I searched for "dog" and "Paul Robeson" to test the websites' ability to handle both general and specific searches.

The overall design of Northeast Historic Film's website is clean and uncluttered; navigation is smooth since one database unifies the entire collection. NFSA's search interface, on the other hand, is more complicated. The "collection search" link presents a number of different databases to choose from. Even the two sentence descriptions provided did not clarify which database would best meet my needs. The database titles appear to contain overlapping material such as the "National Audiovisual Collection" and "Film Australia Collection." Since each database has its own unique search interface, I chose the "National Audiovisual Collection." My comparison will focus on the search functions of that particular database.

The entryway to browsing the collections on the NFSA site is labyrinthine. Upon clicking "film," images from a number of different collections and films appear, seemingly without explanation. Scrolling to the bottom of the page, more conventional browsing links appear, such as "features," "documentaries," and "home movies." Clicking "home movies" reveals a list ordered by decade displaying a total of 88 home movies (which seems low given the size of collection). Returning to the previous page, text describes this list as a "curated selection" of home movies. The navigation becomes

more straightforward when a user chooses to search within the National Audiovisual Collection database.

I could not find any documentation on Northeast's website regarding searching, only the instruction above the search box: "enter a search term in the box below." However, a search this simplified does not require extensive documentation.

The NFSA site contains no specific documentation on the search page, although an update notice about the way certain media were categorized appeared as well as an email address to send feedback. The site provides detailed directions on how to search on its help page. Users can access the help page by clicking the "help" link on the upper right hand side of the webpage. Two pages of search instructions appear on the help page.

The Search Interface

Northeast's site only offers a simple search, either through browsing or typing search terms in a text box. Therefore, a user searching for a specific format must type it in the search box. This makes searching for a particular format (such as black and white 16mm film) difficult. The entire search interface on Northeast's site is straightforward and easy to use, in part because few search options exist—simply a search box and browsing links. A user can browse in a variety of ways, including by "collection names," "places," "genres," "subjects," "decades," or "people and organizations." The design of the browsing screens looks clean and uncluttered.

The NFSA site includes both a simple and advanced search. The advanced search presents a fair number of options. Users can use up to three keywords and apply logical operators. They can also limit search criteria to things like "category" or "format." The advanced search does not allow a user to

search by subject which seems like a deficiency, especially when searching for media about dogs. Within NFSA's National Audiovisual Collection users can only browse by the first letter of the title and then narrow their search based on other criteria, which only seems helpful if the user knows the title of the work they want beforehand.

Quality of Results and Metadata

Northeast's search yielded quality results. When I searched "dog" the search results listed both collections and individual films. All the results were relevant, i.e. films with dogs in them or about dogs. An individual film, "Alan Bemis—Home Movies Reel 10," was one result in my Kodacolor search. The record included "identifier," "collection," (with a hyperlink to the collection page) "date," "abstract," "genre, "subject," "place" (which also included an embedded Google map with pins), "rights," and "copies" (which listed available items). Users can also "like" a record and add comments to it. Given this record, I would definitely have enough information to know that I would like to view the item. The abstract description of the film is fairly general, for example "Margot outdoors Kodacolor poor color." Since I was just looking for anything filmed in Kodacolor, this would work for me, but had I been looking for something more specific I might be out of luck. Only "Families" and "children" were given as subjects of the film, which is too few given the description. Certainly subjects like "dogs" and "nature" could be added.

I received expected results on NFSA when I searched "Kodacolor." However, when I searched for "dog" I was presented with a record for the film *101 Dalmatians*, but right underneath it music from the band Three Dog Night. NFSA could clear do a better job ranking the results based on the search terms. However, the relationships between titles and items are important in the NFSA search

results. When I clicked on a Paul Robeson performance on film I saw that it had a title relationship and was contained within two other titles. NFSA listed Robeson's performance at the construction site of Sydney Opera House as a separate title even though the performance is part of a newsreel compilation. When I examined the record for the newsreel I saw that each news segment listed as a separate title with a relationship to the compilation. This relationship mapping proved extremely helpful to me as a researcher.

Metadata Standards, Documentation, and Granularity

From the descriptions of individual items and collections it seemed like Northeast Historic Film employs the Dublin Core standard or variant thereof, slightly editing the description of fields. Most fields use pure Dublin Core elements, for example, "Identifier," "date" and "subject(s)." Their records for collections use similar fields. For example, "Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use" could map to "rights" and in most cases, "Collection Date Range" could map to "date" (although in some cases there was a date range and not a single date). With collections they add a field called "Biographical/Historical Notes." Metadata elements were not very granular as a "keep it simple" philosophy prevailed. In addition, the browse functions remain very general without hierarchical ordering, simply things like the names of "people," "places," or "genres." I could not find anything about Northeast's specific metadata policies on their website, although I discovered that they have hosted roundtable presentations about metadata.

NFSA also uses some variant of Dublin Core for the "Title Details." When I clicked on an item to look at the "Item Details," I received a different set of metadata that was more moving-image specific

and granular including fields like "gauge," soundtrack," and "colour." This set of metadata seemed close to the CEN standard for cinematographic works.

NFSA's site provided vague documentation about data standards: "Database records are created for moving image works, recorded sound, documents and artefacts in accordance with international cataloguing standards," but didn't get into much more detail than that. They also provide an email contact for cataloging feedback.

Sorting Through Search Results

Northeast's search breaks down by both collections and individual films. The results page orders the results and contained an excerpt of the summary of the item or collection, which makes it easy to sort through them. While I could see the available copies of the item, users either have to call Northeast Historic Film or show up in person to take the next step in accessing the item.

NFSA's search results contain rich information such as the date, the media, and a description. After typing in my search I could then narrow it by choosing a range of years, a country, whether the title had accessible items, or whether the items were accessible online. NFSA's search results document holdings and include a button to instantly request a physical item through their online system.

Northeast Historic Film and NFSA represent two very different collections of media. While Northeast's strong point is keeping the website simple and easy to search, NFSA employs more complicated relationships between records and allows users to conduct a more fine-grained search. The richer mapping of relationships through metadata on the NFSA site supplied more information and connections than I had anticipated.