Protean figures for protean careers in cultural data

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Abstract

This research aims to exemplify the value of comparative visual methods that capture the nuanced trajectories of protean careers in the arts. Protean careers, evolving over time, across sectors and cultural practices are characterised by their dynamic and multifaceted nature [1], and as such, pose unique challenges in data visualisation. While existing literature primarily focuses on data visualisations for the content of GLAM collections [2], illustrating the intricate career paths of artists remains a notable gap. As part of the Australian Cultural Data Engine (ACD-Engine)[1] project, we collected and analysed multi-disciplinary cultural datasets, encompassing biographies of artists, designers, architects, and performers, along with associated works, events, and recognition factors. Our visual methods, while experimental, effectively summarise an individual artist's journey into single, multifaceted representations, revealing distinct trajectories concerning cultural diffusion, the influence of recognition on success, and international presence. Figure 1 presents an example of one visual representation that captured the career trajectory of George Gittoes, an Australian artist, as recorded across three streams of open-source cultural datasets, AusStage, DAAO and IMDb. We refer the reader to [3] for a detailed description of each dataset. Through a series of compelling case studies, we highlight variations in how individuals evolve from local artists to global success stories. Notably, some emerge as late bloomers, attaining international acclaim through transition to new artistic mediums, while others, particularly younger artists, leverage social network platforms like Instagram to establish their global impact. Moreover, the process of unification of cultural datasets in ACD-Engine also yields intriguing insights, uncovering previously unknown artist networks, and offering valuable implications for the preservation of protean biographical data. Our work contributes to cultural analytics, computational humanities, and artistic research, enriching our understanding of cultural production and its evolutionary pathways.
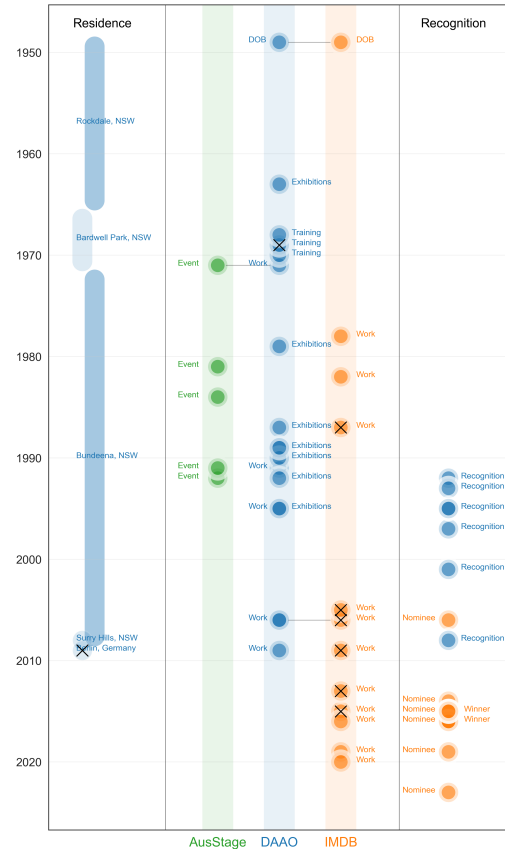
Figure 1: Visualising George Gittoes' career through event-based data.

References

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