

## **Digital Preservation, Archival Science and Methodological Foundations for Digital Libraries**

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*Digital libraries, whether commercial, public, or personal, lie at the heart of the information society. Yet, research into their long-term viability and the meaningful accessibility of their contents remains in its infancy. In general, as we have pointed out elsewhere, “after more than twenty years of research in digital curation and preservation the actual theories, methods and technologies that can either foster or ensure digital longevity remain startlingly limited.” Research led by DigitalPreservationEurope (DPE) and the Digital Preservation Cluster of DELOS has allowed us to refine the key research challenges—theoretical, methodological and technological—that need attention by researchers in digital libraries during the coming five to ten years, if we are to ensure that the materials held in our emerging digital libraries are to remain sustainable, authentic, accessible and understandable over time. Building on*

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*this work and taking the theoretical framework of archival science as bedrock, this article investigates digital preservation and its foundational role if digital libraries are to have long-term viability at the center of the global information society.*

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## INTRODUCTION: THE SIGNIFICANCE AND SCOPE OF DIGITAL PRESERVATION

Libraries have long played a critical role in the creation and transmission of scientific knowledge and culture (Battles 2004; Casson 2001; Hoepfner 2002). As they undergo a metamorphosis from the physical to the virtual, they continue to serve this role, although their nature and reach may be very different in the future. Browsing Candida Hofer's (2007) wonderful collection of images of libraries one wonders what the digital analogue of the photograph of the conventional library will be—will we in the future marvel in the future at entity-relationship diagrams or statements of requirements for digital libraries or only feel a sense of awe when we study images (or emulations) of interfaces to digital libraries? Increasingly, though, as institutions invest in developing digital libraries they come to recognize that the digital assets on which their library depends—their capital assets, so to speak—are fragile and may require substantial continued investment of finance and effort if the holdings themselves are to remain accessible over the longer term (Ross 1999; Ross 2004). In fact, there is a rising buzz within the information management communities about challenges posed by the preservation of digital objects. In this article we consider the digital preservation challenge, the concepts of archival science that might add value to the design and delivery of digital libraries, and a research agenda for digital preservation which aligns digital preservation with more traditional approaches. Digital objects break. Digital materials occur in a rich array of types and representations. They are bound to varying degrees to the specific application packages (or hardware) that were used to create or manage them. They are prone to corruption. They are easily misidentified. They are generally poorly described or annotated; they often have insufficient metadata attached to them to avoid their gradual susceptibility to syntactical and semantic glaucoma. Where they do have sufficient ancillary data, these data are frequently time constrained. Beyond maintaining the intactness of the bit stream (which is fairly straightforward), the long-term curation and preservation of digital materials is for the most part (even in 2012) a labor-intensive artisan or craft activity. While this approach may work well when the numbers of objects are small, the diversity of their types is restricted, their complexity narrow, their inter-relatedness and dependencies minimal, and the scale of digital libraries

containing them limited, there is widespread agreement that the handcraft approach will not scale to support the longevity of digital content in the diverse and large digital libraries that are emerging.

Digital preservation is about more than keeping the bits, those streams of 1s and 0s that we use to represent information (Ross and Gow 1999; Ross 2000, Ross “Approaching Digital Preservation” 2006). It is about maintaining the semantic meaning of the digital object and its content, about maintaining its provenance and authenticity, about retaining its “interrelatedness,” and about securing information about the context of its creation and use. Measured planning and the recognition that “digital curation and preservation is a risk management activity at all stages of the longevity pathway” are critical aspects of the preservation process (Ross and McHugh 2005, 2006). In undertaking preservation planning and action, individuals and organizations must adopt a level of risk that reflects their preservation objectives and capabilities, both organizational and technical. Our approach to preservation must be variable and “digital object responsive”:

- for some materials held in digital libraries retaining the content will be a sufficient outcome;
- for other material we must also retain the environment and context of creation and use; and,
- for still other materials we must be able to reproduce the experience of use if we are to ensure that the right semantic representation and information is passed to the future.

As examples of these three classes of preservation, consider a digital library of literary texts, one of scientific reports linked to data sets, and finally a digital library of computer games. In all these cases each rendition of a digital object must carry the same force as the initial instantiation, sometimes erroneously labeled as “the original.”. As every instantiation is a “performance” representing a range of functions and behaviors, we need ways to assess the verisimilitude of each subsequent performance to the initial one and clear definitions of “acceptable variance.” This approach is most elegantly described in the UNESCO (2003) *Guidelines for the Preservation of Digital Heritage*. Indeed, we have done little to provide mechanisms to establish “verisimilitude” between initial and subsequent instantiations. A paper presented at ECDL 2007 by Lars Clausen of the Statsbibliotek in Denmark is a good example of the kind of work that needs to be done in this area (Clausen 2007)

Although we have, as yet, no statistically substantiated grounds for making this claim, access over time to digital objects appears closely correlated to their continuous use for “business” purposes, and to their perceived and actual recurring value. Recurring value arises from the use of digital objects

for their evidential, information or commercial value. From an evidentiary perspective they might be used to:

- limit corporate liability;
- demonstrate primary rights to an idea, invention or property;
- meet compliance or regulatory requirements;
- achieve competitive advantage;
- facilitate education and learning; or
- support new scholarship.

Recurring value may result from the re-exploitation of materials through leasing them, their sale in new kinds of packaging or contexts, or their release in some new and unexpected way. Certain data sets that are regularly exploited for commercial or research purposes, such as meteorological, diagnostic (especially medical), digital maps, or biological data sets (e.g., genomic or protein databases) are likely to benefit from a level of persistent care that will ensure their longer-term accessibility. Recurring value has variable time-depth and in some instances digital objects, like their analogue counterparts, go out of fashion or use and must survive very long time periods of what Professor Helen Tibbo (2003) of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has called “benign neglect” before they become the subject of scholarly or commercial interest again. As a result of the constant evolution of technology, the degradation of storage media and the ever-increasing pace of “semantic drift,” digital objects do not, in contrast to many of their analogue counterparts, respond well to benign neglect.

## AN APPRECIATION OF THE PROBLEM

How widespread is the appreciation of the digital preservation problem? The answer is not encouraging. ERPANET, with funding from the Swiss Federal Government and the European Commission (IST-2001-32706), led by the Humanities Advanced Technology and Information Institute (HATII) at the University of Glasgow (United Kingdom) and its partners the Schweizerisches Bundesarchiv (Switzerland), ISTBAL at the Università di Urbino (Italy) and Nationaal Archief van Nederland (Netherlands), worked between November 2001 and the end of October 2004 to enhance the preservation of cultural and scientific digital objects. Just before it ended, it completed one hundred case studies involving companies and public sector organizations in an effort to investigate this question. Of these, some seventy-eight are published on the ERPANET website (Ross, Greenan, and McKinney 2004).

The resulting studies provide insights into current preservation practices in different European institutional, juridical and business contexts as well as

across both the public and private sectors. The case studies and results are complemented by research conducted elsewhere, including but not limited to research by InterPARES (Duranti “The Long-term Preservation of Authentic Electronic Records” 2005); a survey of fifteen National Libraries (Verheul 2006); the DigitalPreservationEurope (“List of Competence Centres” 2007) survey of archives and libraries in the EU Member States; the AIIM (2005) surveys in 2004 and 2005; the 2006 Digital Preservation Coalition UK survey “Mind the Gap (Waller and Sharpe 2006); and surveys of national and local archives reported on by Hofman and Lunghi (2004). Basically, as a result of the ERPANET Case Studies, it is safe to conclude that:

- awareness of the issues surrounding digital preservation varied markedly across organizations, and even across different divisions of the same organization;
- few organizations took a long-term perspective and those that did were either national information curating institutions (e.g., archives) or institutions from telecommunications, pharmaceuticals and transportation sectors where failure to adopt best practices creates higher levels of the regulatory risk exposure than in other sectors;
- an organizational strategic approach to preservation was rare (ERPANET 2004);
- the lack of preservation policies and procedures within organizations was “an issue that still needs a lot of attention” (ERPANET “Policies” 2003);
- retention policies were not often noted but where they were, they too were not necessarily implemented across the entire organization;<sup>1</sup>
- there was a general recognition that preservation and storage problems were aggravated by the complexity, diversity of types or formats, and size of the digital entities;
- costs were poorly understood;
- benefits to be derived from long-term preservation have proved elusive and arguments which might convince commercially minded business leaders of the benefits are restricted (ERPANET “Business Models” 2003);
- the value placed on the digital materials by organizations depended on how much the organization relied on the material for business activity; with the highest value placed on information by organizations that either saw or depended on exploiting the potential re-use of information or identified the risks associated with its not being available; and
- organizations were waiting for solutions to be delivered by technology developers, researchers, and service providers.

Preservation of digital materials is a dynamic and evolving process: the methods are changing, as are the technical requirements. It is hard, and the hype surrounding digital preservation has made it even harder. We might

wonder what twenty years of digital preservation research can offer to digital libraries—I fear precious little of any real value. As I have argued (Ross “Uncertainty, Risk, Trust” 2006) elsewhere, during this period, members of the archives, library, records management, and research communities have worked relentlessly to create “an agitating buzz” about “things digital.” Indeed, where preservation is concerned, the “risk amplifiers” have taken the high ground from “risk attenuators,” as is evident from the growth in the number of publications, conferences, and conference presentations during the past ten years that stress how essential it is that we overcome the obstacles to the longevity of digital materials. Through our discussions we have socially amplified the perception of risks associated with digital entities (Kasperson et al. 1988; Kasperson 1992) but mainly within our own community. It would seem appropriate to conclude that we have done this with the best of intentions. As curators of our cultural and scientific memory we want to ensure that we pass our information heritage to future generations in viable form. We recognize that the accountability of individuals and public and private institutions in the digital age depends on the preservation of digital materials. We acknowledge that reuse over time of digital materials will produce opportunities for the growth of creative and knowledge economies. We know that, as the transition from *in vitro* to *in silico* science gathers pace, the longer-term viability of this new scientific paradigm requires that we curate digital materials in ways that ensure their reusability. While we might conclude that a small band of “agitated buzz makers” have alone socially constructed our views of preservation risk, we know from other domains that the process of establishing risk perceptions involves complex social and cultural processes and depends on more than just the actions of individuals (Pidgeon, Kasperson, and Slovic 2003). Indeed, as a result we might even mistakenly conclude that, in creating an agitating buzz about things digital, individuals within the preservation community have in a post-modern sense socially constructed the impression and notions of preservation risk without a basis in reality.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Preservation risk is real. It is technological. It is social. It is organizational. And, it is cultural. In truth, our heritage may now be at greater risk because many in our community believe that we are making progress towards resolving the preservation challenges. If—as I have done elsewhere—one is to contrast two classic statements of the digital preservation challenges, Roberts (1994) and Tibbo (2003), it is obvious that, although our understanding of the challenges surrounding digital preservation has become richer and more sophisticated, the approaches to overcoming obstacles to preservation remain limited. Ross Harvey’s (2005) comprehensive examination of the landscape of preservation, similarly points to only a few implemented preservation methods, and the preservation approaches he examines appear to be best characterized as handicraft. His views are shared by Borghoff et al. (2003). The

preservation community has not yet carried out sufficient underlying experimental and practical research either to deliver the range of preservation methods and tools necessary to support preservation activities or to provide us with sufficient data to reason effectively about preservation risks or how to manage them. We need to be able to reason about preservation risks “in the same way as, say, an engineer might do in the construction industry, or a transport safety expert might, or an epidemiologist in a hospital might” (Ross “Uncertainty, Risk, Trust, and Digital Persistency” 2006). While the work that DigitalPreservationEurope (DPE) (<http://www.digitalpreservationeurope.eu>), the Digital Preservation Cluster of the DELOS NoE (<http://www.digitalpreservationeurope.eu>), and the Digital Curation Centre (UK) (<http://www.dcc.ac.uk>) (Rusbridge et al. 2005) have done in the risk management area, such as the development of the DRAMBORA (Digital Repository Audit Method Based on Risk Assessment) toolkit (McHugh et al. 2007) which enables organizations to reason about risk at the repository level, is worthy of mention, we need similar tools to reason about risk at the object levels as well.

## DIGITAL LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVAL SCIENCE

Scientific communication and in silico research required a new mechanism for managing its scholarly production, dissemination, and preservation. Digital Libraries appeared as a solution; there are lots of them: in the realm of scientific communication, the ACM (<http://portal.acm.org/dl.cfm>), IEEE (<http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/Xplore/login.jsp?url=/Xplore>), Springer (<http://www.springerlink.com>), or Elsevier (<http://www.elsevier.com/>) digital libraries come to mind. But what exactly is a digital library? It is certain that not everyone would agree on the same definition, and so there follows one prepared for the National Library of New Zealand as part of a review of their digital preservation initiatives, which as a result emphasizes preservation. For our purposes here, let us think of a digital library as:

the infrastructure, policies and procedures, and organisational, political and economic mechanisms necessary to enable access to and preservation of digital content. (Ross 2003, 5)

This is, however, a very high-level definition of a digital library, although it is broad enough to encompass the new classes of “digital libraries,” such as YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>) and Flickr (<http://flickr.com>), which are interactive, participatory, dynamic, and user-driven. Taking a more bottom up point of view one might perhaps consider whether the “digital content managing entity” that purports to be a digital library conforms to *The*



*Digital Library Reference Model* (Candela et al. 2011; Ross et al. 2011) as conceptualized by researchers working on the DELOS Digital Library Network of Excellence (<http://www.delos.info>) and finalized by those engaged in the DL.Org Project (<http://www.dlorg.eu>). One way to validate whether or not a digital content managing entity is to use the Digital Library Reference Model Conformance Checklist to carry out an “assessment of compliance of digital libraries and systems with the model” (Ross et al. 2011). While demonstrating conformance has its value for assessors, system designers, librarians, funders, and content contributors when we reflect on the core of digital libraries we easily observe that they may be libraries by name, but they are archives by nature.

Change will be a feature of all digital libraries. The underlying storage technologies will be replaced on a regular basis, services will be closed down and new ones started, and workflows will be adapted as technology, policies, or processes change. The holdings of the repositories will need to be moved to new storage media (i.e., refreshed), migrated, or just emulated. If change is a feature of digital libraries then flexibility in technical infrastructure and organizational approach is the necessary response. The heart of digital libraries is not the technology. It is the policies and procedures that underlie them: deposit agreements, submission information guidelines, management plans, access policies, disaster recovery plans, and preservation strategies (e.g., migration). The greatest challenges to the survival of digital libraries are not the technology, but the organizational and cultural apparatus that makes the operations work and how the institution establishes the trust of the communities of repository users. How can a digital library secure the trust of depositors, users (people and machines), and regulatory bodies that they have the mechanisms in place to secure digital assets for the long term? What steps will they need to take to maintain that trust? And, most importantly, what happens if they lose it?

The content they hold does not really need to be held elsewhere because net-based services mean it can be provided from a single source wherever and whenever it is wanted. Digital libraries, therefore, can hold “unique” exemplars. When users access the content from these domains they expect to be able to trust and verify its authenticity (although not necessarily its reliability), they require knowledge of its context of creation, and they demand evidence of its provenance. These are processes to which archives respond well because they have developed an appropriate theoretical framework and have operationalized it in repository design, management, and use over at least three centuries. The archival framework meets requirements surrounding the production, management, selection, dissemination, preservation and curation needs of information. It also supports a layering of services from repository services at the foundation to user services at upper levels. While these notions originate in the world of archival science, they equally well belong to the world of digital libraries.



Modern archival science began in the seventeenth century with the development of diplomatics (Mabillon 1709). Much of modern archival practice developed in the same early modern period in response to the need to manage distant conquests and distributed trans-national trading companies and economies. One need only think of the 80 million pages of documents in the Archivo General de Indias (Seville) representing the records from the Conquistadores to the end of the nineteenth century or the 14 kilometers of records of the East India Company beginning in 1600 (and its various reincarnations after 1858) to see the scale on which documents were being created during the period (see <http://www.bl.uk/collections/iorgenrl.html>). Beginning in the late sixteenth century there was an unprecedented information and documentary explosion and this trend has continued into the digital age. Over three centuries archival practice and science has responded well to the changing environment of information production and use. Its core principles of authenticity, trust, context, provenance, description and arrangement, and repository design and management evolved during this period and have become more and more refined as the communication and information production and use landscapes have evolved. Others such as appraisal have emerged more recently. If we explore three concepts from archival science, diplomatics as a tool, the concepts of authenticity, and provenance the fundamental place that these concepts play in digital libraries is transparent.

Digital library users might wish to know where the digital materials came from, who created them, why they were created, where they were created, how they were created, how they came to be deposited, how they were ingested (e.g., under what conditions, using what technology, how the success of the ingest was validated), and they may need information as to how the digital object was maintained after its acquisition by the digital library (e.g., was it maintained in a secure environment? have changes in hardware and software had an impact on the digital object in question?). If they were to require or seek such data, they could legitimately expect to be able to acquire this information relatively easily. Their need for this knowledge increases in line with the increase in the time between the point at which the digital object was created and deposited in the digital library and when it comes to be used. Diplomatics, a core tool in archival science, provides the theoretical framework to investigate such questions.

In their rigor, transparency, and methodological precision, the methods of Jean Mabillon, the Benedictine monk who solidified the foundations of diplomatics, mirror those of the generally better known scientific giants who were his contemporaries, including Robert Boyle, Edmond Halley, Robert Hooke, Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, Marcello Malpighi and, of course, Isaac Newton.<sup>2</sup> The “information object” domains to which theorists and practitioners have applied diplomatics have evolved since the early thinking of Mabillon and Papenbroeck.<sup>3</sup> Early scholars, such as Thomas Madox (1702),

felt diplomatics was most appropriately applied to “instruments” such as charters. For nearly two centuries the prevailing intellectual wind, as represented in manuals of diplomatic practice and introductions to what we regard now as classic studies of documents, held that the concepts of diplomatics should really only be applied to juridical documents—the conservative view consistently reigned in more broadminded thinking, Ficker (1877–78) being a good example of this. But, during the twentieth century attitudes firmly changed. For instance, Georges Tessier (1952/1966, 1961), Professor of Diplomats at L'École Nationale des Chartes from 1930 until 1961, argued that diplomatics were applicable to all classes of “documents” and not just juridical ones. This view has been increasingly adopted by other scholars. Luciana Duranti, Professor of Archival Science at the University of British Columbia, who has pioneered the revitalization of diplomatics for the digital age, has argued for its relevance to electronic records (Duranti 1989, 1989–90, 1990, 1990–91, 1991, 1991–92, 1992, 2001, 2005). Indeed, through her leadership of InterPARES 1 and 2 she has led a broadening of the conceptualization of records from including “records produced and/or maintained in databases and document management systems” to “records produced and/or maintained in interactive, experiential and dynamic environments” (Duranti and Thibodeau 2006). Duranti has thereby broadened the types of objects to which diplomatics could be effectively applied. Leonard Boyle, in an elegantly succinct, yet rich, essay argued: “. . . it seems much more realistic and far less precious and selective to describe diplomatics as the scholarly investigation of any and every written documentary source, juridical, quasi-juridical, or non-juridical” (1976, 75). Moreover, there is no reason to limit its applicability to information objects represented as “physical documents”; it can equally well be applied to all information objects held in a digital library, whether still or moving images, audio, vector graphics, and data (and even data held in databases). Broadly speaking, diplomatics provides a critical apparatus to study any information object and this process was encapsulated for Boyle in seven mechanisms to investigate the veracity of an information object: *quis?*, *quid?*, *quomodo?*, *quibus auxiliis?*, *cur?*, *ubi?*, and *quando?*<sup>4</sup>

Diplomatics assists us to assess a digital object's provenance, which relates its origin, lineage or pedigree. Provenance is central to archival practice and to our ability to validate, verify, and contextualize digital objects (Abukhanfusa and Sydbeck 1994). Within the archival context the significance of knowledge about provenance came to be reflected in how documents were managed. So, archivists beginning in the late 18th and early 19th century rejected approaches to the organization of information objects along such lines of pertinence as subject, content, and physical place of creation in favor of respecting the environment of creation and the original order in which the documents had been created and used (Duchemin 1983). To be just a little more precise, the significance of provenance within archival practice emerged not merely in response to the flood of documents that were

arriving at the doors of archives, but from a combination of experience, the cultural milieu of the period which emphasized classificatory practices and evolutionary thinking, and a belief by historians that if material was to be retained in its original order researchers would be able to hear the voices in the documents more accurately, more richly, and with a more precise semantic appreciation (Muller, Feith, and Fruin 1898). As Michael Roper (1994), former Keeper of the Public Record Office (London), put it, “the provenance or context of archives remained a vital means of assessing the source, authority, accuracy and value of the information which they contained for administrative, legal [. . .] research and cultural uses” (187). In fact, provenance is of critical importance to another archival concept, that of appraisal, where the disposition of digital objects is determined. Of course, in the digital age knowledge of provenance continues to be essential, as Peter Buneman (Buneman, Khanna, and Tan 2001; Buneman et al. 2004; Buneman, Chapman, and Cheney 2006) and his colleagues at the University of Edinburgh have argued in the context of databases. In the flexible digital libraries (and digital archives for that matter), we can both retain the knowledge of provenance at all levels of granularity and even repackage the entities along the lines of pertinence if this is required to meet specialized user needs or expectations.

Digital preservation aims to ensure the maintenance over time of the value of digital entities. As the research of the InterPARES Task Force on Authenticity (2004) concluded, “[w]hen we work with digital objects we want to know they are what they purport to be and that they are complete and have not been altered or corrupted.” These twin concepts are encapsulated in the terms authenticity and integrity (Duranti 1995). Digital objects that lack authenticity and integrity have limited value as evidence or even as a source for information. As digital objects are more easily altered and corrupted than, say, paper documents and records, creators and preservers often find it challenging to demonstrate their authenticity. How many of us would be comfortable if our doctor were to use a clinical-trials data set in which he/she could not verify the authenticity of the materials it contained to plan a regime of treatment? The ability to establish authenticity of, and trust in, a digital object is crucial (Ross 2002). A well-documented chain of custody is one factor that helps with establishing authenticity.<sup>5</sup>

Authenticity has become a twenty-first century challenge that reaches into every corner of modern life. Of course, authenticity means different things to different communities; indeed, even within a single domain its meaning can vary from rigid to flexible, as a contrast between the Warhol Foundation approach to validating “authorship” in Warhol works (Brooks 2006) and the judgment in the United Kingdom legal case of Thomson v. Christie’s demonstrates for the art world (BBC 2004; Vyas 2005). The inability to separate the authentic from the inauthentic in the case of counterfeit drugs is creating a “global public health problem causing death, disability

and injury” (WHO 2006; FDA 2004) and the continuing growth in the production of such counterfeit products as handbags, trainers and watches raises concerns over the protection of intellectual property rights and economic returns. At the heart of establishing authenticity lies trust and this is an area where we are just beginning to understand the issues (MacNeil 2000, 2002; Castelfranchi and Falcone 2010).

We live in a post-modernist world, and as the innovative archival theorist, Terry Cooke, has poignantly noted: “The postmodernist tone is one of ironical doubt, of trusting nothing at face value, of always looking behind the surface . . .” (Cooke 2000). Authenticity is a topic that could be the subject of much new research at both practical and theoretical levels; here, we can only draw attention to the issue from the perspective of the user:

- How does a user know that a digital object is an authentic instantiation of the version that was ingested (e.g., deposited) into the digital library? What tools will a user need to have at her/his disposal in this world of digital diplomacies if the user is to be able to make an independent judgment about authenticity? Fortunately the tools are beginning to emerge (CBS 2005; Wang and Farid 2007). What information, functions, and services should the digital library provide to enable the user to be able to authenticate a digital object?
- Confronted with digital objects, those of us who were engaged in the InterPARES 1 (2001) Taskforce on Authenticity concluded that most users begin from a position of presuming that if an object is said to be authentic by the supplier then it is “Presumption of Authenticity.” Unless some evidence emerges that causes them to question the authenticity of an object, users generally assume that, because the object is held by an archives or a library, its authenticity is beyond question.
- There are few ways that a user could even begin to determine whether a digital object is what it purports to be where they lack access to the details of the process by which the digital object was created, ingested, and managed. They can only do this if institutions have adequately and transparently documented the processes of digital entity ingest, management, and delivery.

Without wishing to confuse the issues, it is worth recognizing the distinction between authentic and reliable information (InterPARES 2001). Not all “authentic” material held by a digital library need be “reliable.” Once material comes to be held in a digital library or repository it must be immutable if we are to accept it as authentic. In fact, many digital libraries contain unreliable information, but even unreliable data can tell its own story if its provenance, pragmatics (including context) and purpose can be ascertained. Additionally,

we might raise the issue of content quality in terms of digital libraries; quality is a property of digital objects that needs attention alongside authenticity and reliability (Strong, Lee, and Wang 1997; Batini and Scannapieca 2006; Martinez and Hammer 2005). Of course, as Even and Shankaranarayanan (2007) has demonstrated, the same data may be assessed by different users to have degrees of data utility depending upon context of use. It is clear that we are only just coming to grips with archival science and diplomatics as components of a theory of information object management and a foundation for digital libraries.

## RESEARCH AGENDA

Given the core dependency of digital libraries on guaranteeing the authenticity, integrity, interpretability, and context of the digital material across systems, time, and context, digital preservation/curation action must be at the heart of any future digital library research agenda. If digital libraries are to function in this new technological environment, they will need to be transparent, accessible, and responsive to user needs and expectations. Contemporary research in digital libraries tends to emphasize such research topics as personalization, architecture, representation, retrieval, presentation, and access. And, the investigation of digital preservation has been limited. A casual survey of proceedings from ECDL (now TPDL) and JCDL between 2002 and 2006 showed that most digital library research tends to focus on the here and now, but in the last six year the numbers of papers investigating digital preservation has begun to grow. The addition of a digital preservation cluster to the DELOS Network of Excellence<sup>6</sup> was a visionary move by Costantino Thanos and Vittore Casarosa (Istituto di Sienza e Tecnologie dell'Informazione - ISTI, Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche CNR at Pisa); it reflected their recognition that digital libraries were not just about communicating with the present but that they are mechanisms to facilitate communication with the future. Until recently, however, preservation has not been seen as central to digital library design and development. Those of us who contributed to the creation of The Digital Library Reference Model debated how, if at all, to incorporate preservation functionality and capabilities into what is emerging as an outstandingly robust framework for digital libraries (DELOS 2012).

That said, while some might argue that research in the area of digital preservation has been innovative, in reality it has been far from sufficient to underpin projected digital library developments and the increasing complexity and interrelatedness of the digital entities they will contain. The current generation of solutions, many of which center on migration and emulation, are unrealistic and focus too heavily on narrow aspects of the problem: they are the kinds of solutions that we have described previously as artisan. The

ingest of heterogeneous materials into a digital library (e.g., the digital materials created by contemporary writers or the data sets generated by scientific teams) will only be viable if the processes can be automated, authenticated, and made scalable. Even where it is possible to ingest and effectively document the digital materials drawn into a digital library, these materials will remain in an environment susceptible to constant technological change. As a result, digital curation must be continuous and dynamic; this can only happen if it is automated and the ways we describe (the objects themselves and their context), represent, and manage digital entities radically change.

Despite all the discussions in recent years about what kinds of research are needed in the area of digital preservation, no concise and well-developed strategy that represents the views of a broad community has yet emerged. Since 1989 at least fourteen have been published.<sup>7</sup> One of the tasks of DigitalPreservationEurope (DPE) was to look at the digital preservation landscape and to come up with a research agenda that might be taken forward under the Seventh Framework Programme of the European Commission, as well as at national levels within the Member States of the European Union. Based on an extensive crosswalk of existing preservation research agendas, the DigitalPreservationEurope (“DPE Digital Preservation” 2007) *DPE Research Roadmap*'s objective is to provide a concise overview of the core issues that have to be addressed in future digital preservation research. To construct the framework, my colleague Holger Brocks (of the FernUniversität in Hagen) led participants in the DPE Research Roadmap Working Group (RAWG) to examine the challenges of preservation from five vantage points: digital object level, collection level, repository level, process level and organizational environment that also encapsulates creation and use. As a result, for instance, at the object level we focus on migration, emulation, experimentation, and acceptable loss; at the collection level we examine interoperability, metadata, and standardization; and at the process level we look at issues such as automation and workflow.

First and foremost, the DPE Research Agenda responds to the lack of progress that has been made in the delivery of preservation solutions, methods and techniques over the past twenty years. Secondly, it recognizes that, as those working in the discipline came to better understand the preservation obstacles, they extended the research domain into areas that were originally peripheral to digital preservation. This has actually hampered progress because it has fragmented research activity much too broadly. In response, DPE has proposed narrowing the research agenda and argued that as a research community we must capitalize on ancillary work carried out in other domains such as semantic-enabled information infrastructures, grid-based resources and service-oriented architectures. The DPE team has agreed that there are really nine themes that should characterize our research in preservation. These nine themes also bring digital preservation in line with traditional preservation activities in the analogue world. In addition, there



is one core methodological approach that researchers in preservation need to adopt. Other research agenda have been published since DPE release its agenda, but this model still contains an effective framework for shaping digital preservation scholarship.

The nine themes are:

1. Restoration. Digital objects break. This can occur when storage media become damaged, software and hardware become obsolete, applications become inaccessible either through loss of access or through technological developments, or bit streams become corrupt. When they break and they are unique and valuable, they must be restored. What processes can we use to ensure the syntactical completeness of digital objects and what methods will enable us to address semantic opaqueness? Computer forensics research has led to some restoration methods,<sup>8</sup> but we need more experimental research in this area to develop effective and user-friendly restoration technologies. How do we verify the completeness of a restored digital object? What is an acceptable level of loss at different syntactical and semantic levels? How do we restore content, context, and experience?
2. Conservation. Whereas restoration offers ways to handle objects that have become severely damaged or exist only in fragmentary form, methods for conservation enable us to address challenges that may arise with digital entities before the damage has become too severe, much as we might conserve a post-1830s printed book by de-acidifying it before brittle book syndrome takes hold or adopt preventive medicine. Transcoding, migration, emulation, virtualization, information extraction, metadata enhancement, and semantic annotation technologies are all examples of methods that we might deploy to facilitate the conservation of digital objects. Here again, there are few methods that we can take off the shelf; we simply have not done the research.
3. Collection and repository management. Operational and organizational research into the management of digital objects, collections, and repositories is needed. Research needs to focus on planning, enacting, executing, managing, and monitoring of organizational processes for repositories. For example, how do we construct collections in the digital age? What kinds of service layers do users of digital libraries require and how will these be maintained over time?
4. Preservation as risk management. We have argued elsewhere that digital preservation is a risk management problem (Ross "Uncertainty, Risk, Trust" 2006; Ross and McHugh 2006). Hence, decision-making instruments are needed which will enable digital preservation practitioners to translate the uncertainties involved in digital preservation into quantifiable risks that can be managed.



5. Preserving the interpretability and functionality of digital objects. Our understanding of the properties that digital objects must retain over time if the objects are to remain semantically meaningful, authentic, reliable and usable, whether for rendering or analysis, remains limited. How do we validate verisimilitude of content, context, and performance? What metrics do we have for measuring consistency of functionality and behavior of digital objects over different digital library technical systems and environments?
6. Collection cohesion and interoperability. Digital libraries and repositories handle collections of digital objects as opposed to just discrete entities. It is the integrated nature of these collections that provides some degree of contextuality to the individual objects. Moreover, collections often only gain real value when they can be integrated with collections held by other repositories. The research that has been done into interoperability across generations of systems, time, and repositories has been insufficient.
7. Automation in preservation. The sheer quantity of digital objects with which digital libraries need to deal means that we need to do much more in terms of automation of processes than we have done in the past. The current growth rate continues to exceed predictions. For example, contrast the data in Gantz et al. (2007) with that in Lyman and Varian (2000). Areas where automation has promise include: metadata extraction (Kim and Ross 2007), preservation planning and action (Strodl et al. 2006, 2007), and selection and appraisal. To date, the tools that support automation of processes are quite limited, require human intervention, and do not scale. Again, we simply have not done the underlying research, experimentation, and testing.
8. Preserving the context. Establishing the semantic meaning of digital objects and even collections depends upon retention of contextual information. How was the object created? How was it used? What was the legal or social context of its value? What kinds of processes are necessary to construct context and meaning? Research into contextuality is needed.
9. Storage technologies and methods. On the one hand this is an engineering problem and on the other it is a deployment problem. The digital library community has much to offer the preservation community through its research into the GRID and its collaborative initiatives in the domain of eScience.

One might wonder why issues such as metadata are absent from this list (Duff 2004). The reason is that metadata issues cut across many research lines from interoperability to contextualization.

Until very recently, much preservation research has been practically and conceptually led and little of it has actually involved well-designed experimentation. This is not to suggest that there has been no experimentation to

date, but to point out that it has been limited. Examples include Arms et al. (2001) and Nelson et al. (2005). A good summary of the work in this area is provided by the DPC/PADI (2009) website.

Every aspect of preservation research from characterization of digital objects to preservation planning to user needs analysis requires experimental research. Some of the post-2003 research and support activities related to digital preservation in Europe, such as the Digital Curation Centre (DCC) in the UK (<http://www.dcc.ac.uk>), DigitalPreservationEurope (DPE), CASPAR (Cultural, Artistic and Scientific knowledge for Preservation, Access and Retrieval) (<http://www.casparpreserves.eu/>), PLANETS (Preservation and Long-term Access through NETworked Services) (<http://www.planets-project.eu>), and the Digital Preservation Cluster of the DELOS Network of Excellence in Digital Libraries (DELOS-DPC) (<http://www.dpc.delos.info>) reflect the realization that we need to be much more experimentally driven in our research endeavors if we are to progress the digital preservation research agenda.

Building experimental testing environments has long been a feature of established scientific disciplines. For instance, researchers at Children's Hospital Boston (2008) engineered a transparent Zebrafish to enable them to observe the migration of cancer cells (i.e., certain cancer cells appear to have a "homing instinct" that means they seek out particular sites in organisms). In science there are many other examples of this kind of testbed construction to ensure consistency in scientific research and comparability of results. If digital preservation is to act in a scientific way it needs to improve a whole range of methods that underpin scholarly activity. Among these is the construction of experimental environments.

In digital preservation research a testbed would provide, a collaborative research environment where preservation tools and services could be systematically tested and evidence as to their suitability could be collected, compared, and made accessible to other research groups. In the PLANETS project the team had the objective to construct a reusable testbed environment which would provide project partners with access to a controlled research infrastructure. Building on the work conducted carried out by the Dutch Preservation Testbed Project and by the Testbed Project of the DELOS Digital Preservation Cluster the Testbed development led by HATII at the University of Glasgow designed, developed, tested, deployed, and maintained a testbed environment (Aitken et al. 2008). The Planet's Testbed identified a six step experimental process: (a) define basic properties, (b) design experiment, (c) run the experiment, (d) collect the experimental results, (e) analyze the results, and (f) evaluate the experiment. The testbed supports all parts of the process from the definition of the problem through to the retention of the results for subsequent comparison and analysis. It is, like the Transparent Zebrafish, a tool that underpins good science.

## CONCLUSION

Digital libraries must adopt a theoretical stance; recent discussions about curricula for undergraduate and postgraduate education in digital libraries make this lack of a theoretical knowledge base really evident. Indeed, the team led by the School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Department of Computer Science at Virginia Tech conducting the US National Science Foundation project to develop a curriculum for education in digital libraries have reported that “research and development in the DL area will flourish only if it has a firm theoretical foundation” (Pomerantz et al. 2006). Another perspective comes from Moss and Ross (2007). As I previously noted, library science has not demonstrated that it has the theoretical foundations and knowledge base that are capable of providing the framework for handling digital entities and for underpinning digital libraries. Moreover, as digital libraries are more akin to archives than they are to conventional libraries, we need to seek their theoretical foundations in the domain of archival science and their practices in archival and records management environments. Archival science, with its principles of uniqueness, provenance, arrangement, and description, authenticity, appraisal, and its tool sets such as diplomatics and palaeography, may offer us a framework for a theoretical foundation for digital libraries. This article might have examined the issues surrounding digital paleography. In the same way that using knowledge about different scripts (e.g., Insular round compared with Caroline minuscule) allows a paleographer to make inferences about the origin and production of documents, a digital paleographer will be able to use information about the characterization and nature of digital objects to draw conclusions about the process of production, use, and authenticity. The boundaries of diplomatics and digital paleography still need to be defined for the digital age, much as they did in the seventeenth century.

The value of digital libraries rests very much in their ability to communicate our cultural and scientific knowledge to the future; if they are to do this, we must address the digital preservation and curation challenges and to do this we need to be more collaborative, better coordinated, and even competitive.

At the same time there is an urgent need for a theory of digital preservation and curation. The moves to develop theoretical framework for digital preservation will benefit from scholarship in the area that is more rigorous, methodologically founded, repeatable, verifiable, contextualized, and more effectively reported; that is, it could conform better to the “scientific paradigm.” It needs to be more “experimental” than it has been up to now, something that, as I have noted, a number of new research projects are attempting to inspire. These experimental results will provide us with mechanisms to predict more accurately the likelihood of certain conditions arising,

and a better appreciation of how to measure the implications of uncertainties associated with digital objects and longevity pathways. Not only do we need to try to better understand what we might do to alleviate obstacles to the longevity of digital materials, we must do more to define the uncertainties related to digital preservation and to convert these uncertainties into known, measurable, and mitigatable risks. We should, of course, make a genuine distinction here between perceived risk and actual risk; an actual risk represents an assessed and measurable risk—we just do not know in a measurable way in the context of digital objects which risks are actual risks.

## NOTES

1. The findings of ERPANET in Europe are also borne out by evidence in the USA. In legal cases involving the securities and financial sectors more generally staff often report that they were ill advised about how they should handle records. *In re Old Banc One Shareholders Securities Litigation*, 2005 US Dist. LEXIS 32154 (N.D. Ill., 8 December 2005), “Bank employees testified they did not know missing documents should have been retained, and the bank did not inform employees of the need to retain documents for this litigation or have employees read and follow the electronic version of the policy that was established.”

2. Jean Mabillon (b. 1632–d. 1707) and Daniel van Papenbroeck (b. 1628–d. 1714). Contemporaries: Robert Boyle (b. 1627–d. 1691), Edmond Halley (b. 1656–d. 1742), Robert Hooke (b. 1635–d. 1703), Antoni van Leeuwenhoek (b. 1632–d. 1723), Marcello Malpighi (b. 1628–d. 1694), and, of course, Isaac Newton (b. 1643–d. 1727).

3. The groundbreaking work of Daniel van Papenbroeck (b. 1628–d. 1714) is worthy of discussion, but space prevents consideration of it in this article.

4. Had, for example, Hugh Trevor-Roper (Lord Dacre) adhered to these principles of analysis, which depend upon asking questions about *who*, *what*, *in what manner* (e.g., *form*, *formulae*, *style*), *with what support*, *aid or help*, *why* (e.g. *what purpose*), *where*, and *when*, when he acted as a member of the group engaged to determine the authenticity of the “Hitler Diaries” in 1983, he might not have been led astray. One could cite dozens of other examples, including some in which the materials in question were held within archives. When these principles are applied they can assist scholars, as is evident in the study by L. Berlin and H. Craig Casey, “Robert Noyce and the Tunnel Diode.” *IEEE Spectrum* (May 2005): 42–45. See especially page 43 where the authors describe the process of validating copies made from pages of Noyce’s laboratory notebooks.

5. For example this can be seen from the point of view of the police in: The National Hi-Tech Crime Unit produced for the Association of Chief Police Officers, (n.d.), *Good Practice Guide for Computer Based Electronic Evidence*, version 3.0, <[http://www.acpo.police.uk/asp/policies/Data/gpg\\_computer\\_based\\_evidence\\_v3.pdf](http://www.acpo.police.uk/asp/policies/Data/gpg_computer_based_evidence_v3.pdf)>.

6. DELOS: Network of Excellence on Digital Libraries (G038-507618) funded under the European Commission’s 6th Framework IST Programme, <<http://www.delos.info> and <http://www.dpc.delos.info>>.

7. The fourteen are: NHPRC, *Research Issues in Electronic Records: Report of a Working Meeting*. (St Paul, MI: Minnesota Historical Society for the United States National Historical Publications and Records Commission, 1991); M. Hedstrom, “Understanding Electronic Incunabula: A Framework for Research on Electronic Records,” *The American Archivist* 54.S (1991): 334–355; J. Garrett and D. Waters (co-chairs), *Preserving Digital Information: Final Report and Recommendations*, Commission on Preservation and Access and the Research Libraries Group, 1996, <<ftp://ftp.rlg.org/pub/archtf/final-report.pdf>>; Ann Arbor Report, *Electronic Records Research and Development: Final Report of the 1996 Conference held at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 28–29 June 1996*, Ann Arbor, MI: School of Information, Bentley Historical Library, and National Historical Publications Records Commission, 1997; D. Liesley and S. Jones, *An Investigation into the Digital Preservation Needs of Universities and Research Funders*, London: BLRIC Report no. 109, 1998, <<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk/services/papers/bl/blri109/datrep.html>>; NSF and LC, *It’s About Time: Research Challenges*

in *Digital Archiving and Long-term Preservation*, 12–13 April 2002, sponsored by the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the Library of Congress (LC), 2002, <<http://www.si.umich.edu/digarch/NSF%200915031.pdf>>; CLIR Report, *The State of Digital Preservation: An International Perspective*, Washington, DC: Council on Library and Information Resources, 2002, <<http://www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub107/pub107.pdf>>; M. Hedstrom and S. Ross (eds), *Invest to Save: Report and Recommendations of the NSF-DELOS Working Group on Digital Archiving and Preservation*, National Science Foundation's (NSF) Digital Library Initiative & The European Union under the Fifth Framework Programme by the Network of Excellence for Digital Libraries (DELOS), 2003, <<http://delos-noe.iei.pi.cnr.it/activities/internationalforum/Joint-WGs/digitalarchiving/Digitalarchiving.pdf>>; P. Lord and A. McDonald, *e-Science Curation Report*, JCSR Report, 2003, <[http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded\\_documents/e-ScienceReportFinal.pdf](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/uploaded_documents/e-ScienceReportFinal.pdf)>; Cyberinfrastructure, *Revolutionizing Science and Engineering Through Cyberinfrastructure*, Washington DC: Report of the National Science Foundation Blue-Ribbon Advisory Panel on Cyberinfrastructure, January 2002, <[http://www.communitytechnology.org/nsf\\_ci\\_report/report.pdf](http://www.communitytechnology.org/nsf_ci_report/report.pdf)>; DigiCULT, *The Future Digital Heritage Space: An Expedition Report*, DigiCULT Thematic Issue 7, 2004, <[http://www.digicult.info/downloads/dc\\_thematic\\_issue7.pdf](http://www.digicult.info/downloads/dc_thematic_issue7.pdf)>; D. Giaretta and H. Weaver, *Report of the Warwick Workshop, 7–8 November, 2005: Digital Curation and Preservation: Defining the research agenda for the next decade* (2005), <[http://www.dcc.ac.uk/events/warwick\\_2005/Warwick\\_Workshop\\_report.pdf](http://www.dcc.ac.uk/events/warwick_2005/Warwick_Workshop_report.pdf)>; R. Heery and A. Powell, *A Digital Repositories Roadmap: Looking Forward* (2006), <<http://www.eduserv.org.uk/upload/foundation/pdf/rep-roadmap-v15.pdf>>; N. Beagrie, *e-Infrastructure Strategy for Research: Final Report from the OSI Preservation and Curation Working Group*, Edinburgh: National e-Science Centre, November 2006, but published in 2007, <<http://www.nesc.ac.uk/documents/OSI/preservation.pdf>>.

8. Companies such as OnTrack Data Recovery (<http://ontrackdatarecovery.com>) or DriveSavers ([www.drivesavers.com](http://www.drivesavers.com)) have developed a rich array of data recovery technologies. The methods and processes are getting better, as Scott Gaidano, co-founder of DriveSavers, points out: “eight years ago [1997], 50 percent of our drives could not be restored. Now up to 90 percent of the data can be salvaged from 85 to 90 percent of drives,” E.A. Taub, “Bad habits keep data recovery firms alive,” *International Herald Tribune* 16–17 July 2005, 14.

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