The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation. **By Trevor Owens. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018. 234 pp. Index. Softcover. $34.95.**

The world of digital materials presents archivists with many opportunities to access, present, and engage with materials in more flexible ways. Of course, this also presents challenges, including feeling like we do not know the "right" way to proceed, or knowing that we lack the resources to proceed the way we believe is best. In *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation*, Trevor Owens offers a set of frameworks and concepts related to digital preservation with the expectation that an understanding of a few basic principles will provide an informational foundation, allowing archivists to respond with professional expertise and creativity to the ever-evolving digital landscape.

The structure of Owens's book makes it possible to read it cover-to-cover, or in targeted sections, depending upon need. Each chapter begins with an overarching concept about digital preservation, followed by examples of how this concept might be applied to different archival settings, and then a summary of the concept. In doing this, Owens emphasizes the dependent nature of every idea he introduces, encouraging the reader to be ever-cognizant of the ways that differing needs and contexts will impact the approach. Taken together, the chapters address all of the major aspects of digital preservation, including making preservation decisions, managing the overall system, establishing processing practices, and enabling access. However, any chapter could be selected and studied on its own to inform a particular preservation decision or meet a particular institution's need.

Owens begins with 16 "guiding axioms" for readers to keep in mind while reading. These include statements about what digital preservation *is* as well as what it *is not*. According to Owens, digital preservation is an ongoing process that can never be said to be complete. It is made possible only by institutions and institutionalized systems because the short lifespan of a single individual cannot ensure the long-term preservation of digital objects. Digital preservation is about "making the best use of your resources to mitigate the most pressing preservation threats and risks" (p. 7). Digital preservation, as with all preservation, must sometimes proceed under less than ideal circumstances. Owens also exhorts us to remember that neither hoarding nor backing up data is equivalent to digital preservation. Likewise, digital preservation is not something accomplished solely by software. He explains that "tools can get in the way just as much as they can help" (p. 5).

Owens presents three different frameworks to consider when making digital preservation decisions, though these can also be applied to physical collections. The artifactual framework values the object in its most literal sense, requiring any preservation work to focus on historical contiguity even as the object inevitably deteriorates over time. The informational framework values the information contained within the object, which may or may not be connected to its appearance or format. The folkloric framework is not concerned with the thing itself, nor with the precise replication of information, but with the sociocultural meaning of the thing. Going into depth with each of these frameworks and providing examples of each, Owens argues that archivists must have a sense of what frameworks they are operating under before proceeding with any digital preservation

strategy. Because of the complexity of many digital objects, we need to understand what aspect of a thing we are trying to preserve. This decision will be rooted in the object itself and our particular institution's mission, as well as what is and is not possible given available resources and technologies.

Owens argues that the nonlinear database logic of digital media demands that we approach it differently. As we work with an increasing number of digital collections, we must recognize that our work becomes more about "surfacing descriptions" than writing them, and more about making "sense of information flows" than "establishing an order" (p. 158). However, he notes that many of the principles we use to govern physical collections can inform our work in the digital realm. Digital preservation is recognizably iterative. A plan must be in place to ensure collections will be reassessed and cared for over time. He also reviews the More Product, Less Process (MPLP) approach, and evaluates how it applies to work with digital collections. At every turn, Owens makes an effort to communicate that most trained archivists have access to the knowledge they need to venture into the basics of digital preservation.

A particularly useful aspect of this book is Owens's commitment to going beyond technical aspects to include discussions of the sociocultural contexts in which digital preservation work occurs. He argues that, as a craft, digital preserv,a activities should be under the purview of professionals. It is crucial to have the right workers to achieve your digital preservation goals and to compensate them accordingly. This becomes increasingly challenging in an era when both labor and cultural institutions are being devalued. Additionally, while emphasizing the importance of identifying what aspect of a digital object needs to be preserved, Owens discusses the increasing importance of collaborative practices and changing our appraisal strategies. For instance, he offers examples of how digital preservation practices are being leveraged to document social movements fueled by fleeting online activity. He also discusses the relationship between libraries, archives, and museums and the power structures of society, noting that these institutions often exist only with the support of the power structure and, as such, function "as part of systems of control and oppression" (p. 167). Reversing this course requires thinking systematically about collection development, preservation, and access. Owens's conclusion echoes this when he identifies digital tools themselves as holding the potential for increased oppression. He warns, "the tools of digital technology are not here to emancipate us. They are tools created on behalf of the power structures of our society and are intended to bring about their vision of a future" (p. 193). Therefore, any work we do in the digital realm should include an understanding of the role these tools play in our society and in our profession.

The overall tone of this book is approachable and friendly. Owens writes for an audience of trained archivists who may be new to digital preservation concepts, while also presenting ideas that could cause seasoned digital preservation professionals to pause and reconsider their practices. The usefulness of Owens's examples and metaphors cannot be overstated. He harnesses the power of storytelling to make the content accessible to those with little background on the topic. Owens has selected excellent case studies that enable readers to conceptualize how their own institution might be similar to and

different from the scenarios he presents. The sheer number of examples, and the variety found within them, is evidence of Owens's extensive experience with this topic, giving readers the sense that we can have confidence in his ideas. The downside to the number of examples offered is that, at times, a chapter lingers exhaustively on a topic. Had I not been reading the book cover-to-cover for the sake of this review, I likely would have skimmed the examples less relevant to my context to better focus on those more helpful to me. I do not think fewer examples would improve the book, but I would recommend that readers proceed through the book strategically.

The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation arrives at a time when the volume and complexity of digital preservation needs are growing exponentially in a world where not every archivist has the time or resources to be trained to meet the challenge. This book is equally useful both as an introductory overview and as a reference to keep close at hand as new questions arise. While avoiding edicts about what we ought to do in different scenarios, it empowers archivists with a foundational understanding from which we can make thoughtful and informed decisions appropriate to our particular situations. Anyone looking for an approachable introduction to digital preservation, or a new perspective on persistent digital quandaries, will find something useful in this book.

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