

Book Reviews

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Digital Imaging Technology for Preservation. Proceedings from an RLG Symposium Held March 17 and 18, 1994. Ed. Nancy E. Elkington. Mountain View, Calif.: Research Libraries Group, 1994. 139p. \$20.

RLG Digital Image Access Project. Proceedings from an RLG Symposium Held March 31 and April 1, 1995. Ed. Patricia A. McClung. Mountain View, Calif.: Research Libraries Group, 1995. 104p. \$20.

Scholarship in the New Information Environment. Proceedings from an RLG Symposium Held May 1-3, 1995. Editor: Carol Hughes. Mountain View, Calif.: Research Libraries Group, 1996. 76p. \$20.

Selecting Library and Archive Collections for Digital Reformatting. Proceedings from an RLG Symposium Held November 5-6, 1995. Symposium organizer: Ricky Erway. Mountain View, Calif.: Research Libraries Group, 1996. 170p. \$20.

The easiest way to fill a lecture hall with librarians and archivists and maintain interest past lunch is to call a symposium on digital imaging technology and its impact on . . . well, on just about anything. The growing number of conference sessions, preconference workshops, and multiday intensives on digital image conversion, full-text encoding initiatives, and change, change, and more change attests to the nearly insatiable demand for basic information, creative thinking, and reassurance that what we know about managing information is not obsolete. The four volumes considered together here are a part of a booming literature expressly designed to demystify a complex technology.

The Research Libraries Group (RLG),

which parented these publications, has one of the most consistent track records for organizing timely conferences. Just past its twentieth anniversary, RLG has evolved into an increasingly international membership corporation of 150 universities, archives, historical societies, museums, and other institutions. Founded on the faith that sharing catalog records could make resource sharing a practical reality, RLG built an effective mechanism for exchanging in-depth information on books and serials, preservation microfilm masters, and primary source collections. It established a system for direct book borrowing among members, and pioneered large-scale cooperative preservation microfilming projects. These programs thrived in part due to the growth of the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN), a centralized bibliographic database that now encompasses some 75 million catalog records. RLG's livelihood has depended almost as much, however, on its uncanny ability to document best practice, formulate guidelines, and train and enlighten practitioners on topics that matter.

Ostensibly documenting the proceedings of four discrete membership symposia, the four volumes reviewed here train a spotlight on the use of digital technologies by librarians and archivists. The reader benefits from their consistent format and presentation, production values that are uniformly high, and skilled editing of generally lucid writing by some of the strongest thinkers in research libraries today. Best appreciated when considered together, the volumes are as important for their gaps, partially formulated ideas, and inconsistencies as they are for the events they record. They may well be some of the

most useful resources for gauging our collective understanding at mid-decade of the future of core programs and services in research institutions.

Digital Imaging Technology for Preservation owes its genesis to a strategy session of RLG's preservation reformatting interest group (PRESERV) in which members expressed concern about the preservation implications of proliferating digital imaging systems. Working on a short deadline, a steering committee assembled a winning list of presenters organized as a sequence of plenary addresses bracketed by five tutorials on the key aspects of digital technology. Opening and closing addresses provide political and administrative context for the use of digital technologies in libraries. Don Waters' closing remarks, especially, are an early formulation of the deep and lasting institutional infrastructure requirements worked out more completely in the recently completed report *Preserving Digital Information*. The general address articulates the argument that quality is and should remain the centerpiece of digital reformatting. The address also presents the framework of issues that drives the tutorials.

The tutorials themselves, as reported in the volume, add real substance to the proceedings. They will be most useful to the advanced beginner, especially the three focusing on imaging system components and standards, quality control, and indexing. Don Williams' tutorial on the digital conversion process is a technically proficient overview of the complexities of achieving a digital scan that represents the characteristics of the original source document. Peter Graham's overview of the intellectual challenges of long-term access foreshadows his more extensive treatment published in *College & Research Libraries* some months later.

By focusing rather exclusively on the imaging process, symposium participants did not dig very deeply into the core issues of selection, use, and usability. Nevertheless, the symposium denotes a watershed in thinking about the preservation applications of digital technology. Only Janice Mohlenrich's 1993 compilation tackles

the subject in depth prior to the RLG symposium. The proceedings are fraught with what might best be called "terminological flux." Concepts such as refreshing, reformatting, and migration used interchangeably throughout the meeting today have taken on a more distinct meaning thanks to new research and thinking spawned in part by uncertainty uncovered at the symposium itself.

The shifting nature of the concepts of "image" and "access" appear again in the invitational symposium called to review RLG's Digital Image Access Project (DIAP). In the context of this project, image equates with photographic prints and negatives transformed to digital bit-maps, whereas access largely means varying ways to represent the content and relationships of visual images in the resulting databases. The goal of the DIAP was to explore the potential of digital imaging technologies for making photographs more widely available online and at the same time to push the potential of inter-institutional cooperation beyond its traditional emphasis on joint cataloging and microfilming projects. For DIAP, nine research each libraries selected 1,000 photographic images that in some way pertained to the common theme "the urban landscape." This theme left a lot of room for participants to make their own decisions about their contribution without additional effort to form the final product into an intellectually cohesive whole. A single vendor provided image conversion services, while each library was free to index the images as deemed appropriate.

The published proceedings are an honest representation of the outcome of the imaging experiment. Anne Kenney and Jim Reilly frame the symposium with summaries of the overall purpose of the pilot project and a technical review of the quality of the end product. In between, the focus of the symposium was largely on the advantages of varying approaches to image indexing. Jackie Dooley describes the ways in which each institution used the USMARC record in the RLIN database. Stephen Davis presents a fairly radical alternative, the SGML catalog record,

that taps the potential of the Standard Generalized Markup Language to record the interrelationships among images more completely than possible in traditional catalog records. Daniel Pitti pushes the description alternative even further by describing the experience of the UC Berkeley library in developing a standardized way of creating archival finding aids for collections containing digital images by using SGML.

The strength of the proceedings is the even-handed treatment of alternatives. In all digital imaging projects, success from the perspective of those who use the resulting system is dependent on the issue of the quality and comprehensiveness of the image index, particularly so for photographic transformation. Recently completed research projects at Yale and Cornell universities are demonstrating conclusively that even simplistic value-added indexing accounts for one-third of the cost of the image conversion process. The proceedings of the RLG symposium explore the options but provide no "silver bullet" solutions. The reader is left with a fuller appreciation of the complexities but no guidance or evaluation methods for resolving the issues raised. This has partly to do with one of the weaknesses of all of the symposia considered in this review, namely, that the meetings are not structured in a way that fully engages the audience in seeking a consensus on what RLG members need to do to reach new levels of sophistication. Perhaps appropriately, the balance of the symposia is tilted toward education and consciousness-raising and away from coalescing a shared sense of purpose and outcome.

The editor of *Scholarship in the New Information Environment* rightly suggests in the preface that a more apt title of the conference proceedings might well be "support for scholarship . . ." This volume is all about the changing notion of collection development in libraries and archives, given the opportunities and complexities inherent in information technologies. The intellectual heart of the symposium is Ross Atkinson's assertion that the only way to succeed in cooperative collection development in the online

era lies in "the creation of a single, international, distributed, virtual library" (p. 30). The proceedings of Atkinson's presentation only tease the reader. His full treatment of these ideas was published in *Library Quarterly* a year after the symposium.

The gauntlet thus laid down, RLG assembled an eminent group of thinkers at Harvard University to speculate on the shape and character of digital collections as they should be built to satisfy the needs of scholars. Czeslaw Grycz focuses on the nature of scholarly communication and the role librarians play in adding value to the process. Douglas Greenberg's briefing concerns itself with trends in humanities scholarship in the context of changing technologies. He challenges librarians to establish programmatic priorities with the overall goal of wise collection development. "The most significant change imposed on us by the new technology and the new scholarship is, finally, not so much what technology to use and how to use it, but rather what to collect" (p. 41).

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of the symposium was Hal Varian's treatise on the economics of information. What is striking about his model of differential pricing structures for information goods is not the model itself but its mere existence in a discussion among librarians and scholars. Varian applies lessons from successful traditional publishing industries to the world of electronic journals in a series of pointed examples. He concludes that producers (including libraries and archives) may need to establish pricing mechanisms that vary according to quality level and consumers' willingness to pay.

It seems appropriate that RLG hosted three complex symposia and compiled the results before convening a meeting to consider the complexities of choosing which materials should enter the digital realm. *Selecting Library and Archive Collections for Digital Reformatting* set as its purpose the tall order of reviewing the changing landscape of selection decision making and providing basic selection strategies. Clifford Lynch provides the framework and philosophical foundation for the discussion. The focus is clearly on

"reformatting" in the sense of digital copying. Except for Lynch, none of the presenters considered the formidable challenges of selecting, acquiring, and integrating sources that exist in electronic form from their point of creation (e.g., electronic journals, image databases created elsewhere, numerical databases, and geographic information systems). Perhaps more importantly, the symposium did not delve into the connection between selection and the cost of building virtual libraries, in spite of strong presentations on funding options, relationships with publishers, and the management of service bureau costs.

The format of the symposium mixed formal presentations setting the context governing selection with case studies and a selection exercise completed by audience members and then analyzed by a panel representing diverse library and archive perspectives. The selection symposium was the only one of the four reviewed here to engage the audience actively in the formulation of ideas. While not particularly successful in this regard (the audience was far too large and diverse to accomplish the goal), the interpretation of the results demonstrated both the complexity of the selection process and the need for a radical departure from traditional models of single-institution collection development.

The gems in the proceedings are deeply buried and can only be appreciated with additional study of texts alluded to in passing or cited in footnotes. Consider, for example, Samuel Demas' discussion of the role of collection developers in selection for digital reformatting. The heart of his quite strong argument on behalf of the core literature approach to selection is Ross Atkinson's unpublished typology of the qualities of the resulting digital product (p. 17). Similarly, Barclay Ogden's solid review of preservation priorities is a mere outline barely reflecting the burgeoning literature on long-term access, such as the publications from the Commission on Preservation and Access. In *Preservation in the Digital World*, for example, this reviewer argues that digital imaging technology is more than another

reformatting option. "The digital world transforms traditional preservation concepts from protecting the physical integrity of the object to specifying the creation and maintenance of the object whose intellectual integrity is its primary characteristic (p. 4).

Nancy Allen's excellent closing remarks should be read first. She describes the infrastructure that provides for the long-term success of digital reformatting programs. Engagement of the issues outlined at the beginning of the symposium (technology, access, copyright, and preservation) largely flows from the commitments of institutions working alone and together to build in quality and integrity from the start. The struggle in the concluding wrap-up session to define the relationship between digital image conversion and long-term preservation reflects the lingering challenges of selection. Only on the last page of the proceedings (p. 135) is there an attempt to coalesce a set of priorities for selection from among many competing interests.

As recently as three or four years ago, librarians and archivists who wanted to learn about trends in digital imaging had to satisfy themselves with obscure technical reports, dry government analyses, and standards documents focused on business and industry applications. The volumes reviewed here are at times no less dry than these earlier reports. The cumulative strength of the proceedings is diluted somewhat by a lack of cross-fertilization among symposia—in spite of the fact that a large portion of the participants listed in the back of the volumes attended several or all of the meetings. Yet they form a record of technology assessment stemming from years of experimentation, pilot research, and concerted thought on the connection between emerging digital technologies and the organizations we are building. As such, the proceedings of RLG symposia are important tools in our self-education.

Beyond their important educational role, however, the symposia proceedings provide little assurance that the Research Libraries Group is positioning itself to produce the kind of implementation

guidelines that emerged from years of cooperative microfilming projects. In earlier models, RLG facilitated the meetings of seasoned practitioners, which then led to wider symposia designed in large measure to focus best practice. There is strong evidence in these publications that RLG can assemble talent, recruit participants, and document the result. This is an important start. Future symposia should transcend their all-important educational role and begin formulating a shared sense of purpose, priority, and procedure that typifies past collaborative efforts.—*Paul Conway, Preservation Department, Yale University Library*

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Preservation Management: Policies and Practices in British Libraries.

John Feather, Graham Matthews and Paul Eden. Hampshire, England and Brookfield, Vt.: Gower, 1996. 174p. \$67.95 (ISBN 0-566-07622-5). LC 95-36428.

According to the authors, this book began as a study of preservation management practices in the libraries of Britain in the early 1990s. The authors initially were following in the footsteps of F.W. Ratcliffe and D. Patterson (1984) who produced the influential *Preservation Policies and Conservation in British Libraries: Report of the Cambridge Univer-*

sity Library Conservation Project, known simply as the Ratcliffe Report. This report strongly criticized the state of preservation and conservation in British libraries and made recommendations for improvement. Great changes have taken place in British libraries since publication of the Ratcliffe Report. To determine how preservation management practices have changed, the authors conducted a survey. They sent 682 questionnaires to public, academic, and special libraries in Britain. Four hundred eighty-eight completed questionnaires were returned—a response rate of 71.55%. When analyzing these responses in the context of current developments in library and information service provision, the authors realized that preservation management was now considered in terms of access and use of books and information. This new perspective is reflected throughout the book.

Information in the book is based on the results of the survey, literature in the field, the authors' work experience (which unfortunately is only briefly described on the dust jacket) and the authors' conversations with their colleagues. The book consists of seven chapters, each of which is divided into several sections. Chapter one is impressively documented with 165 notes, but all the chapters have numerous references cited. The description on the book's dust jacket states that the book first puts the survey results into historical context and then "moves on to the findings about management attitudes and practices. Policy issues are considered, and some of the national and international prescriptive policy documents issued by professional organizations are compared with those from British libraries. The differences between the two form the basis of suggestions about how individual libraries might develop preservation policies and also what national policies could be considered."

One of the most interesting and informative chapters for me was the first, "A Decade of Development." Here the authors discuss developments that have taken place since publication of the Ratcliffe Report and assess the influence the report has had on bringing about these