TOWARD COLLABORATIVE MODELS for SUSTAINING DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP

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2019-12-10
DH is a “semi-normal thing”
-Underwood, 2019
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But sustaining DH is not.

“Even on campuses with DH centers, there is rarely an end-to-end solution”
-Maron & Pickle, 2014
DH is a “semi-normal thing” - Underwood, 2019

But sustaining DH is not.

Why not?
- Context-dependencies
- Familiar sociotechnical challenges: Short-term funding, creator-dependence
- Lack of clarity about “ownership” and value (Maron & Pickle, 2014)
- Institutional capacity
- Need for new models of institutional partnership for living, community-centered collections
404

This is not the web page you are looking for.
Today’s agenda... • Research on scholar-generated collections
• Defining sustainability
• Existing approaches to sustainability
• Toward collaborative, community-centered models

• Goals:
  – Give us a conceptual handle on contribution
  – Rethink what sustainability means
  – Persuade you of the need for systemic re-orientation toward collaborative models
Overarching research project:
Scholar-generated digital collections

- What are these collections and how do they contribute to scholarship?
- What are the challenges for libraries and scholarly publishing entities in supporting this mode of digital scholarship?
Overarching research project:

Scholar-generated digital collections

Two main findings:
- Varieties of contribution
- Difficulty of sustaining and preserving
Overarching research project: Scholar-generated digital collections

Varieties of contribution

A collection’s contributions are defined around what it means for the collection to be complete

- Is it mainly providing a definitive set of sources?
X yet there was an harmony in that very diss

X We were strange to any species of disunion

sev servants had any request to make her it always through the intercession of Elizabeth For me I loved he We agreed perfectly although there were many There For, although

was a great dissimilitude in our characters. X I was more calm and philosophical than my companion Yet I was not so mild or yielding.

My application was of longer endurance than hers but it was not so severe

endured as hers whilst it lasted my amusements were studying old books of chemistry
Overarching research project: Scholar-generated digital collections

Varieties of contribution

A collection’s contributions are defined around what it means for the collection to be complete:

- Is it mainly providing a definitive set of sources?
- Is it mainly providing interpretive context for exemplary sources?
Relationships of Clare, Ada

To explore the relationships between the various bohemian writers and artists who frequented Pfaff's bar, select a person or group, and then select a relationship type. This section of the site is currently under construction; new content is being added on a regular basis.

Displaying 1 - 80 of 80

Select Person or Group
Clare, Ada

Select Relationship
- Any -

Apply

acquaintances

Aldrich, Thomas Bailey (1836-1899)

Aldrich was familiar with Clare during the 1890s; his poem "Bohemia" of New York.

Burroughs, John (1837-1921)

Parry quotes Burroughs' 1862 description of Clare as a "brilliant woman" who "ought to be sentenced to forty years' silence; 'My heart bleeds for Abbey!'" for her reviews of H.A. Murray's A Panorama of Bohemia and his caustic woman" who "ought to be sentenced to forty years' silence: 'My heart bleeds for Abbey!'" in her reviews of H.A. Murray's A Panorama of Bohemia and his caustic woman" who "ought to be sentenced to forty years' silence: 'My heart bleeds for Abbey!' (29).

Howells, William Dean (1837-1929)

Howells met Clare at Pfaff's and said she was "altogether a gifted woman."
Overarching research project: Scholar-generated digital collections

Varieties of contribution

A collection’s contributions are defined around what it means for the collection to be *complete*

- Is it mainly providing a *definitive* set of sources?
- Is it mainly providing interpretive *context* for *exemplary* sources?
- Is it mainly providing *platforms* for new uses / new kinds of *evidence*?
  (e.g., remodeling sources as data)
Overarching research project: Scholar-generated digital collections

Difficulty of sustaining and preserving

Variety of contributions results in:

• Difficulty of systematizing sustainment and preservation
• Discontinuity with artifact-oriented preservation paradigm
Overarching research project: Scholar-generated digital collections

Difficulty of sustaining and preserving

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We lack shared definitions:
• Of different modes of DH contribution
• Of what sustainability means for different kinds of projects
What we mean by “sustainability”

- Widely varied definitions (Eschenfelder et al., 2016)
- Organizational resilience, economic viability
- Sociotechnical aspects (Langmead et al., 2018)
Existing approaches

• DH Centers as memory institutions
  – Center-level, burdensome maintenance efforts (Smithies et al., 2019; Madsen and Hurst, 2018; etc.)
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• Service levels
  – Layers / levels of institutional commitment to preservation for artifacts (Madsen and Hurst, 2018; Oltmanns et al., 2019; etc.)
Existing approaches

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• **Infrastructures and aggregations**
  – Creating shared infrastructure for humanities scholarship and collaboration
  – Scaling up: Aggregating digital content toward critical mass
  – Advancing preservation repositories and publishing platforms for more complex and networked digital objects and linked data
Existing approaches

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• **Promising movement toward shared stewardship, participatory and post-custodial partnerships**
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Yes, and:

Distinguishing sustainability and preservation for essentially interactive resources / components

Digital collections and objects are...

- Metaphorical, computed (Becker, 2019)
- Networked and externally dependent
- Making contributions through active use
- “Living” things serving communities

Community-centered sustainability
Rethinking sustainability

A digital humanities collection is sustained as long as it responsively supports the endurance of the communities that create it as a locus of memory, communication, and knowledge production, for as long as useful, and in whatever forms are useful.

-Fenlon and Muñoz, forthcoming
What are the implications of community-centered sustainability?

Sustaining collections depends on understanding and maintaining idiosyncratic, distributed, collaborative workflows of collection development and maintenance.

There are critical roles for libraries here that may not involve a collection “handoff”

But we need more research! On...

- Research communities and their collections
- Workflows
- New models of partnership
Next phase of research:

Sustaining Digital Community Collections

How do communities understand and implement the sustainability of their own digital collections?

• The meaning and forms of sustainability
• The meaning, making, and use of collections
• Roles for libraries and cultural institutions
Toward collaborative models of sustainment

Reviewing emergent models of partnership and shared stewardship:

Toolkits, best practices, sub-granting, consultation, workshops, minimal computing investments, practices for building personal connections and trust, principles, policies, agreements...

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Toward collaborative models of sustainment

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Integrating new conceptual and empirical work on:

- Slow archives, critical and community archives
  (Christen and Anderson, 2019; Caswell & Cifor, 2016; etc.)
- Research communities, community endurance, and workflows
  (from CSCW, science of science, public library theory and practice, info sci, etc.)
Future work

• Realizing community-determined, community-led strategies for sustaining digital collections

• With new models of support from cultural institutions
Links to featured projects

- https://projects.lib.wayne.edu/iamaman/panel4
- https://linkedjazz.org/
- http://coloredconventions.org/
- http://shelleygodwinarchive.org/
- http://www.blakearchive.org/
- https://xpmethod.plaintext.in/torn-apart/volume/2/
- http://enslaved.org/
- https://pfaffs.web.lehigh.edu/
- http://earlywashingtondc.org/
- https://iti-corpus.github.io/
- https://www.dc1968project.com/
References


• Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. (2019). Shared stewardship of collections policy. Retrieved October 22, 2019, from [https://folklife-media.si.edu/docs/Folklife/Shared-Stewardship.pdf](https://folklife-media.si.edu/docs/Folklife/Shared-Stewardship.pdf)
Just in case...
What makes this hard

- Connective tissue and networked dependencies
- Conditions of creation
- Lack of infrastructure for collaborative workflows
Very, very preliminary observations

• Within-project disagreement about
  – The nature of the contribution
  – The meaning and forms of sustaining the contribution
  – Everyone is right!

• The most unsustainable and vulnerable pieces of a collection infrastructure are processes or workflows
  – Of development, maintenance, and growth

• Need for improved language around contributions and workflows
Humanities research infrastructure

Some components of infrastructure for research and communication in the humanities

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Challenge 1: Essential interactivity for specialized use

• Much of humanities digital scholarship is essentially interactive
  – dynamic, responsive, participatory

• The scholarly contribution is realized by interactive components
Interrelationships among components

- Encoded transcriptions
- Page images
- Standard data models: TEI, ODD, ...

Relationships among other components, some abstract or conceptual, are implemented indirectly.
Overarching research project:

Scholar-generated digital collections

• Methods:
  • Interviews with experts in established and productive DH centers
  • Typology of ~150 collections
  • Content analysis of 3 collections