

Book Reviews

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Trevor Owens. *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation*. Baltimore, MD:

Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018. Paperback, 240p. \$34.95 (ISBN13: 9781421426976).

When asked to review this book, I jumped at the chance as it was published serendipitously to efforts I am making to articulate the digital-preservation ethos at my institution. Trevor Owens' *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation* serves as a refresher for the seasoned digital preservation practitioner, as well as providing new insights for how to undertake these efforts, all the while being approachable for the novice. Owens boldly chose to write this work from a first-person point of view, which makes it all the more engaging. It is filled with quips such as on page 107, where he has been discussing the need for maintaining multiple copies. He urges the reader, "If you don't have a second copy of content you care about ensuring access to, stop reading the book now and go and make one."¹

Owens was named the first Head of Digital Content Management for Library Services at the Library of Congress (LoC) in August 2017. His first role with the LoC had been as a Digital Archivist with the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP). In between, he was the Senior Program Officer overseeing the development of the National Digital Platform portfolio at the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).² He is a frequent contributor to

1. Trevor Owens, *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 107.

2. Wikipedia, "Trevor Owens," available online at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trevor_Owens [accessed 22 August 22, 2019].

the field, including being one of the authors of the National Digital Stewardship Alliance's (NDSA) Levels of Preservation, an aspirational matrix for benchmarking the technical aspects of one's digital preservation program.³ Owens has twice been recognized by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) for his digital preservation work. First, in 2014, he received the Archival Innovator Award,⁴ and, in 2019, he was given the Waldo Gifford Leland Award⁵—created in 1959, this prize encourages and rewards writing of superior excellence and usefulness in the field of archival history, theory, or practice—for this very book.⁶

Often an activity may be referred to as an “art and science,” meaning that there is something concretely subjective and objective about the activity. As a former insurance appraisal professional, I can say this was true of our industry; there was the objective science of calculating the cost of reproduction, while there was the subjective art of determining depreciation. A craft, on the other hand, is more of a melding of those two approaches. Owens is intentional in the use of “theory and craft” as opposed to “art and science.” He categorically suggests that digital preservation is a craft and not a science, nor is it primarily about technical or universal solutions. Rather, “it is about crafting the right approach for a given preservation context.”⁷

In the Introduction, Owens outlines his 16 guiding digital preservation axioms as a means of framing his ensuing discussions. He notes that it is not a chapter-by-chapter layout for the book, but “a useful way to help define what exactly digital preservation is and isn’t.” All of his axioms are things he perceives as “central to the craft of digital preservation.”⁸ One axiom immediately resonated with me, so much so I immediately added it to the digital preservation ethos brainstorming mind map on the whiteboard in my office: “Digital Preservation is about making use of your resources to mitigate the most pressing preservation threats and risks.”⁹

This book is not a “how to” step-by-step manual such as Adrian Brown’s 2013 *Practical Digital Preservation: A How-To Guide for Organizations of Any Size*,¹⁰ or Ryan and Sampson’s 2018 title, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Born-Digital Content*, to which Owens

3. Levels of Digital Preservation, available online at <https://ndsa.org/activities/levels-of-digital-preservation/> [accessed 22 August 2019].

4. Society of American Archivists, “Archival Innovator Award: Trevor Owens,” available online at <https://www2.archivists.org/node/18922> [accessed 13 September 2019].

5. Society of American Archivists, “Waldo Gifford Leland Award: Trevor Owens,” available online at <https://www2.archivists.org/node/23758> [accessed 13 September 2019].

6. Society of American Archivists, “Waldo Gifford Leland Award,” available online at <https://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section12-leland> [accessed 13 September 2019].

7. Owens, *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation*, 73.

8. Owens, *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation*, 4.

9. Owens, *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation*, 7.

10. Adrian Brown, *Practical Digital Preservation: A How-to Guide for Organizations of Any Size* (Chicago, IL: Neal-Schuman, an imprint of the American Library Association, 2013).

provides the Foreword.¹¹ Rather, in the first three chapters, he lays out the theoretical basis of digital preservation, connecting it to the archival and preservation practices established for analog records and other predigital artifacts, via a discussion of preservation's divergent lineage. Further, he provides for an understanding of digital objects, while examining the challenges and opportunities for digital preservation. In the following five chapters, Owens delves into the craft of digital preservation, examining topics including preservation intents and collection development, managing copies and formats, arranging and describing digital objects, as well as enabling multimodal access and use. Similar to O'Meara and Stratton's 2016 *Trends in Archives Practice: Digital Preservation Essentials*,¹² Owens incorporates a myriad of case studies. However, the difference here is that he integrates and weaves the various case studies throughout the narrative, reinforcing the concepts he is currently discussing.

Echoing Richard Pearce-Moses' 2006 SAA Presidential address, "Janus in Cyberspace: Archives on the Threshold of the Digital Era,"¹³ Owens suggests, "The craft of digital preservation is anchored in the past.... At the same time, the craft of digital preservation is also the work of a futurist."¹⁴ This craft is one in which an organization or institution and its personnel hone and refine it within their local context, minimizing the most pressing risks, while realizing it is not an issue solely solved via technology and/or technological solutions. To that end, I intend to engage my institutional colleagues in a dialog, using this book as a common reading and discussion tool.

One final thought to sum up the nature of digital preservation activities: I was struck by the extensive and heartfelt acknowledgements Owens provides prior to the Introduction. Even before he regales us with his thoughts on the theory and craft of digital preservation, Owens indicates that these efforts are clearly collaborative and networked in nature—digital preservation is not something to be accomplished on one's own.—Dan Noonan, *The Ohio State University*

Gerald Vizenor. *Native Provenance: The Betrayal of Cultural Creativity*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2019. Hardcover, 199p. \$29.95 (ISBN 9781496216717). This is a critical moment for those who care for Native American and Indigenous archives. After much discussion, debate, and years of tireless advocacy, the *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials* has finally been endorsed by our leading professional organizations. The Association of College and Research Libraries,

11. Heather Ryan and Walker Sampson, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Born-Digital Content* (London, UK: Facet Publishing, 2018).

12. Christopher J. Prom, Kyle R. Rimkus, Erin O'Meara, and Kate Stratton, *Digital Preservation Essentials* (Chicago, IL: Society of American Archivists, 2016).

13. Richard Pearce-Moses, "Janus in Cyberspace: Archives on the Threshold of the Digital Era," *The American Archivist* 70, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2007): 13–22, <https://doi.org/10.17723/aarc.70.1.n7121165223j6t83>.

14. Owens, *The Theory and Craft of Digital Preservation*, 187.