INFO220 Discussion 7

Question

We are creating more digital content every day â€" electronic books, journals, images, moving images, audio, and other multimedia. We are communicating through a multitude of platforms from email, social media, etc. â€" As we have discussed â€" almost all human output is of interest to the humanities. In the context of the challenges of digital preservation â€" are we facing the greatest age of loss? Thoughts on best practices for digital preservation moving into the future?

Answer

If the age of loss is defined as not being able to preserve everything (and therefore losing access to things we had access to previously) than we have always been experiencing an age of loss. I think its foolhardy to think we can preserve everything. There is simply too much. But I also wouldnâ€™t focus on what we have lost or what can be lost but rather expend energy on what can be preserved and what should be preserved. Digital preservation is really important particularly in our digital age. The increased spotlight on its significance is good. Its good to understand the issues and seek to implement best practices with preserving born digital items as well as harnessing technological advancements to create digital copies of deteriorating analogue objects. Advancements in digital technology continue to improve to better support preserving born digital items as well as preserving analog items in digital form.

Although digital preservation is expensive and in many cases requires more work than with preserving physical objects, it is well worth the effort. I like this quotation attributed to Fran Berman:

> "Data is fragile and needs to be stewarded in the 'cyberworld' just like we need to take care of rain forests and the environment in the physical world. Preserving valued data in the information age is fundamental to ensure that it will continue to inform and enrich our world for the foreseeable future."

The key in my mind is identifying the priorities and selection criteria to determine what will be preserved. If we assume we can't preserve it all than what can we preserve? What is worth the time, money, and effort? The technical issues of digital preservation are easy compared to being able to identify what's important and worth preserving. Looking back on the history of computer technologies and seeing how far things have come I feel hopeful for the future. It's amazing to consider how more open computing platforms are today than they were 10-20 years ago. The abilities to exchange data formats between various operating systems and to migrate data to and from different formats continues to get better. The capabilities for digital preservation continue to improve both in quality and quantity. Although we may be living in an age of loss I am hopeful that future scholarship will be done in an age of increasing digital preservation.

References

Library of Congress, (n.d.). *Fran Berman: Digital preservation pioneer*. Retrieved from http://www.digitalpreservation.gov/series/pioneers/berman.html

Smith, A. (2004). Preservation. In S. Schreibman, R. Siemens, & J. Unsworth (Eds.), *A Companion to Digital Humanities* (pp. 576â€"591). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.