LIBER QUARTERLY, ISSN 1435-5205

K.G. Saur, Munich, Printed in Germany

Best of Both Worlds

CONCLUSIONS

OLD & NEW PARADIGMS

By the nineties of the twentieth century microfilming had finally reached a level of quality and durability that made it a safe and secure surrogate for books and documents that were threatened by acid paper decay. Large-scale microfilming programs were set up un the US (Library of Congress), Germany (DFG), France (BNF), England (Newsplan) and The Netherlands (Metamorfoze)

The same decade witnessed rapid new developments in digital technology. The internet opened up new perspectives for accessing library collections. Information became more and more digitally based, and finally digitisation offered new possibilities for creating surrogates of paper documents.

It was clear that both microfilming and digitisation had their own qualities and purposes: microfilming was well suited as surrogating method for preservation. It was reliable and relatively cheap.

From the start digitisation was mostly applied in the field of access. Making library material available for the public. It was relatively expensive, but it offered a number of new features, such as colour, location-independent access and search facilities.. It was not considered as a useful preservation method because of the rapid obsolescence of maintaining and retrieving techniques.

Now we see a paradigm shift. Digitisation might also be applied for preservation purposes. All over the world heritage institutions are confronted with the necessity of preserving digitally born documents, so more attention is given to create and keep up environments in which digital media can be preserved on on a long-term basis. This is essential: if digital data can be kept at reasonable effort and cost for more than, say, 100 years, digitisation will have made a major step forward as a surrogating method for mass preservation. Furthermore: digitisation is becoming cheaper. And image quality has increased rapidly during the last few years. Microfilming has developed too: preservation colour microfilming is now a realistic, though expensive, option. Another development is the introduction of techniques to combine microfilming and digitisation: scanning of microfilms, hybrid camera's and computer output microfilming.

TIME TABLE

As the sources we want to preserve are detoriating now, we simply have to do something. We cannot wait five years postponing our choices. Politics demand strategies and continuity based on constant reviewing of our objectives and methods, In view of the rapid developments it is necessary to take a timetable as starting point. First, where are we now? And what should we choose today?

In mass-preservation we are in a hybrid age. Microfilming is at its peak in quality due to standardisation. It is a reliable and cost-effective preservation method. But it has its disadvantages on the aspect of access. On the other hand, digitisation is rapidly evolving as a preservation method. But it's not there yet. The three problems that have not been solved are: costs, image quality/file size and long-term preservation.

Quality

In microfilming projects, we have only just started to work according to a standard workflow, in which the quality needed for preservation is guaranteed. The results of many microfilming projects of the last decades of the twentieth century appear to be quite disappointing when we retrieve these old films in order to make digital scans. We do not want to have to face this problem again in the future, regardless our choices. So, as Hans van Dormolen and Dennis Schouten have emphasised, we have to keep concentrating on quality and maintain our high standards. Regardless of the technical developments or future choices. When a surrogate is created, it should reflect all features of the original.

Cooperation

Furthermore we have to prevent that the same work is done twice. Werner Schwartz showed how the European Register of Microform Masters (EROMM) serves as an international database of surrogates, mostly analog, but also containing digital surrogates, which allows us to check if any publication has already been microfilmed or digitised, but also provides the possibility to order a copy of the surrogate. It is necessary that we continue exchanging expertise on an international level. Conferences and workshops are an important contribution to the share our knowledge in this area.

Technique

As things are rapidly changing at the moment and we have to keep an open eye for these developments and continuously reconsider our choices. You never know when the future becomes the present. Christine Quillet showed the introduction of new technical assets, which will allow us to create all sorts of combinations to create reliable surrogates and

keep up accessibility. Mayliss Bremer-Laamanen gave an clear indication of the new features of digitisation, preserving, but also accessing library materials even better and easier than the originals.

We leave now and go to the near future. What should be our concern in the short term?

There are two lines of action: first we have to develop a policy in applying analog or digital techniques for mass preservation purposes. Yola de Lusenet argued that different aims require different strategies. For low-use material where access is of less importance, microfilming might still serve well as a preservation method, whereas high-use material would require digitisation. When setting priorities we always have to bear in mind the possibilities and limitations: in economics, in strategy and in technique. Another line of action is the combination of the two processes to improve the efficiency and the cost-effectiveness, as Henriette Reerink has explained. Technology offers several possibilities to do so.

Now let us look at our perspectives for the long-term. Meg Bellinger added two important issues to the discussion: she showed us where the techniques of microfilming now stand in relation to their general acceptance as preservation method, and gave an indication of the increasing pace in the development of new techniques. There are no generally accepted standards for quality and authenticity of digitised documents yet, on the same level as they are now being applied for microfilming. Here a lot of work has still to be done. But a full shift to digitisation as preservation method might be expected in the future. However, she argued, digitisation is not preservation, but microfilming isn't either. It's not about capturing the image, but about preserving it. And it's the effort and costs involved here that will decide our choices.

Maybe we should discard the old paradigm on the long-term, as Graham Jefcoate has stated, Connect your policy for microfilming and digitisation with your over all library policy. Always consider your objectives, your target group and your funding possibilities.

CONCLUSION

Set aside the paradigms: eventually it is about preservation and access. Preservation is about quality and durability and access is about public demands and information, but both are part of our core business. This demands a holistic approach. Thus microfilming and digitisation both can be embedded in the strategy of an organisation and in the daily work of libraries and other heritage institutions. Eventually, despite the seeming

contradictions, microfilming and digitisation will be friends after all. The best of both worlds. Double fun.

WEB SITES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

Bibliothèque Nationale de France. http://www.bnf.fr/

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). http://www.dfg.de/

European Register of Microform Masters (EROMM). http://www.eromm.org/

Metamorfoze. http://www.kb.nl/coop/metamorfoze/home.html