

# Book Review: Preserving Complex Digital Objects

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Preserving Complex Digital Objects  
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This collection comprises contributions from 33 authors and is based on the results of Jisc-funded Preservation of Complex Objects (POCOS) symposia, which took place in the UK in 2011 and 2012. The symposia brought together international experts on complex digital objects and aimed to review research and practice to date, point to solutions and suggest areas where more work was needed.

The last five years or so of the digital revolution have produced a proliferation of technologies. Many of them are ephemeral and involve social networking, cloud computing, online gaming or virtual art. Digital objects, simple and complex, surround us. Simple digital objects such as documents, images or e-books are fairly easy to make safe and accessible for the future generations. This is considerably more difficult with complex digital objects. For the purpose of this book, the types of complex objects have been narrowed down to simulations/visualisations, digital/software art and gaming/virtual environments. These by no means cover all types of complex objects but represent a selection of most distinct categories.

The three types of complex digital objects are also very different in nature. Simulations and visualisations tend to be more generic and produce outputs in many different fields such as archaeology, film, architecture or engineering. We are used to simulations and visualisations in these fields and indeed expect them in exhibitions, galleries or presentations. Software or digital art presents its own problems for curation and preservation. There is often no distinction between the master art piece and its clones so it may be hard to decide which art piece should be retained and preserved, even before the method of preservation can be considered. In the case of games, the main issue is intellectual property rights as many games are orphans.

All complex digital objects share overarching characteristics - they are technologically highly advanced and analysing and preserving them involves multiple levels of difficulties. Interestingly but perhaps not surprisingly, some are also hybrid, part digital and part physical artefacts. Needless to say, this does not make their preservation easier. The book raises questions about why and what to preserve. In the case of complex digital objects, the answer to these questions is in itself complex. The authors explore to what extent the process of selecting for preservation may interfere with the process of creation and delve into the meaning of preservation in the context of a virtual world. After all, how can we preserve interaction? The collection looks at how different memory institutions attempt to preserve complex digital objects and suggests which approaches may bring

authentic and long-term results. The chapter on case studies illustrates challenges faced by digital preservation in the areas of art, animation and archaeology.

The authors do not shy away from offering practical advice. The chapter on approaches, practice and tools focuses on technical know-how and includes guidelines for the preservation of complex objects. Techniques and methods are examined, as are metadata issues, which arise in the preservation process. As is often the case, digital preservation involves legal issues and this book offers an interesting summary on how the law views preservation activities.

This collection is a valuable contribution to the digital preservation literature. Although somewhat academic in parts, it is sufficiently practical to be of use to practitioners, particularly those working in memory institutions and faced with issues of digital preservation of complex digital objects.