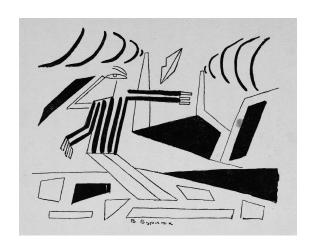
Vol. 22

SOLANUS

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRINTED AND WRITTEN WORD IN RUSSIA AND EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

New Series Vol. 22 2011



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Applications of Digital Technology to Slavic Librarianship ¹

Aaron Trehub

The purpose of this article is to examine recent developments in information technology and suggest some ways they might be applied to the practice of Slavic librarianship. I have qualifications in both fields: originally trained as a Russian-affairs analyst and a Slavic bibliographer, I have for the past seven years been the director of library technology at Auburn University, a large land-grant university in east-central Alabama, in the American Deep South. Unlike the other large land-grant university where I used to work - the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign - Auburn does not have a strong Slavic Studies programme or a large Slavic library collection. Nevertheless, I continue to lurk on the Slavlibs e-mail forum, and so have an idea of what Slavic librarians spend at least some of their time doing. Most of it seems pretty traditional: answering questions or responding to requests from patrons, weeding collections of duplicates, swapping information on vendors, and speaking as a community on issues of concern (for example, gaps in the online version of the Russian Academy of Sciences Bibliography). One thing I have noticed is that there is hardly any discussion of Big Questions on the list - questions like the one considered in this article – and very little discussion of technology and its effects on the field. That's understandable, perhaps: Slavlibs is a working list for working librarians, and its focus is overwhelmingly practical. But I belong to other working lists for working librarians, and big questions do occasionally crop up. They usually take the form of a pointer to a provocative article or blog entry, often on some technology-related subject – for example, the Google Books legal settlement and what it portends for libraries and librarians, or open-access publishing, or the latest piece of social software and possible applications for it in libraries. That there is hardly any of this on Slavlibs, and that Slavic librarians rarely surface in other, more technology-oriented library forums, does suggest that the future of Slavic librarianship in the digital era is pretty far removed from most people's day-to-day concerns.

The first thing that needs to be said about the digital era is that there is a lot going on in it and that it is difficult to keep track or make sense of it all. In librarianship alone, we have Google Books,² the Open Content

Alliance/Internet Archive,3 HathiTrust ('a shared digital repository' led by the University of Michigan, Indiana University, the University of Virginia, and the University of California system),4 and other mass-digitization initiatives; the launch of the UNESCO-sponsored World Digital Library in April 2009;5 the eXtensible Catalog,6 Open Library Environment Project,7 and other collaborative initiatives aimed at building open-source integrated library systems from the ground up; and new discovery software tools, both commercial and open-source, that promise to make the library's local collections as well as millions of journal and newspaper articles and conference papers available through a single search interface (the almost inevitable qualifier is 'Google-like'), with relevance ranking and faceted browsing. All of these developments are interesting and most of them are encouraging, although there is uneasiness in the American library community and indeed elsewhere about Google's role and intentions.8 On the less-encouraging side, there is continuing speculation about the usefulness and relevance of libraries in general and academic libraries in particular, the death of the traditional book as a means of cultural transmission (manifested in the buzz around Amazon's Kindle, Barnes & Noble's Nook, Apple's iPad, and other e-readers),9 the death of bibliography as a discipline, and the advent of a 'digital dark age' in which digital information gradually degrades or disappears down the memory hole. People who entered librarianship expecting a sedate career in which established order prevailed and the pace of change was slow must now be feeling like Humphrey Bogart's Rick Blaine, who went to Casablanca 'for the waters': they were misinformed.

In my almost twenty years as a professional librarian, I have seen a gradual but definite shift in emphasis from content curation to content creation. To paraphrase current OCLC Vice President for Research (and former JISC staff member) Lorcan Dempsey, libraries have traditionally acquired and managed literature by and for others. This is now changing, and fairly rapidly. Libraries are adding the creation of new scholarly content, or the publishing of it, to their traditional role as organizers and stewards of content created by other agencies. As a result, the boundaries between libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural-memory institutions have started to dissolve. I think these are positive developments, and hope they continue. How they will affect our field in five years, or even three, I don't pretend to know. Given the tumultuous events of recent years and the rapid pace of technological change in general, long-term prognostication seems rather beside the point. I do think that librarianship is at a fateful juncture,

but find the prospect invigorating rather than dismaying. Whatever the challenges ahead may be, I think that we can best serve our profession by joining forces with our counterparts in other cultural-memory institutions and focusing on first principles, which include discovery, open access, enrichment, stewardship, and the long-term preservation of the human record. In that spirit, then, I intend to offer some suggestions and exhortations as a former Slavic bibliographer and current library technology specialist. A caveat: this article will not discuss Twitter, Facebook, or mobile applications ('apps'), mostly because I haven't clarified my thinking about their relevance (except as current-awareness tools) to academic librarianship in general and Slavic librarianship in particular. Instead, I will focus on the more-established areas of digitization, discovery, and digital preservation.

Digitization

The first suggestion concerns digitization. In the past decade, many academic and public libraries have embarked on local digitization projects and are adding digitization to their list of routine activities. Slavic collections are contributing modestly to this trend. The *Inventory of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Digital Projects* at the Slavic and East European Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign¹¹ currently lists almost 200 digital projects at universities, libraries, museums, and archives around the world. Among many other projects, it includes 'Seventeen Moments in Soviet History' (a multimedia timeline of the years between 1917 and 1991) at Michigan State University;¹² the Prokudin-Gorskii collection of colour photographs from pre-revolutionary Russia at the Library of Congress;¹³ the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System collection at the Harvard College Library;¹⁴ and 'Russia Engages the World' at the New York Public Library.¹⁵

This is all well and good, but I think we could be doing more. Take mass digitization – that is, the large-scale digitization of printed materials. The leader in this field is still Google Books, which currently contains over ten million digitized volumes,¹⁶ although HathiTrust is growing rapidly and now contains approximately half that number.¹⁷ University of California professor Geoffrey Nunberg published a much-discussed article about Google Books' deficiencies last year in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, with plenty of amusing examples of Google's metadata howlers.¹⁸ I am sure that similarly risible examples could be found today. However, Google

Books is getting better, as well as more comprehensive. I just searched the database for occurrences of the word 'это' and got well over five million page hits in a fraction of a second. The experience of browsing the titles was pretty enjoyable - in fact, the writing of this article was delayed while I flipped through a lavishly illustrated 1996 edition of *Macmep u Mapzapuma*. Furthermore, Google Books now contains digitized versions of classic reference works that ought to be of interest to Slavic bibliographers and librarians in particular. For example: when I searched Google Books less than a year ago for the presentation on which this article is partially based, V. I. Mezhov's Русская историческая библиография (published 1882-1890) was not among the search results. It now is, along with other works by Mezhov, and in fully searchable Cyrillic text. I would suggest that Slavic librarians build on Google's work by identifying seminal titles in Russian bibliography (or history, or literature, or philosophy, or ethnography) that are in the public domain but have not been digitized, locating copies in their collections, and outsourcing their digitization, preferably with support from a professional or scholarly association (e.g. ASEEES in the United States or BASEES in the United Kingdom), a regional academic or library consortium (e.g. the Committee on Institutional Cooperation or LYRASIS in the United States, or the M25 Consortium of Academic Libraries in the United Kingdom), or a national library agency (e.g. the Council on Library and Information Resources in the United States or UKOLN in the United Kingdom). The results could be made available through the HathiTrust or the Internet Archive - or Google Books.

It would also be interesting to explore consolidating digital collections on a common topic but at different institutions into a single virtual collection using the Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH)¹⁹ and an open-source indexing and discovery tool like Villanova University's VuFind,²⁰ Oregon State University's LibraryFind,²¹ or DSpace, a widely used application for creating institutional and subject-based repositories that was jointly developed by the MIT Libraries and Hewlett-Packard.²² According to the Registry of Open-Access Repositories (ROAR), there are currently over 1,800 repositories in more than 50 countries, including 339 repositories in the United States, 177 in the United Kingdom, 33 in the Russian Federation, 12 apiece in Poland and Ukraine, and two in Estonia.²³ My institution is working with other academic libraries in the southeastern United States and the Atlanta-based Association of Southeastern Research Libraries (ASERL) on setting up a repository for digital collections having

to do with the American Civil War, in connection with the 150th anniversary of the start of that conflict in 2011.²⁴ Why not a multi-institution digital initiative to mark an upcoming anniversary in Slavic and East European history or culture? It would be a good way of using technology to strengthen collaboration among Slavic collections in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and possibly other countries as well.

Discovery

Creating digital collections is one thing; putting them in front of users is another. One way to do this is to add them to the library's traditional catalogue through an open-source discovery tool like VuFind or a commercial discovery package like EBSCO Publishing's EBSCO Discovery Service, Ex Libris' Primo Central, or Serials Solutions' Summon.²⁵ At Auburn University, we are harvesting our digital collections into our VuFind installation, which offers an easy-to-search, faceted view of the library's traditional collection and locally created digital content.26 Another way to get digital collections in front of users is to take advantage of social networking sites like Wikipedia and Flickr. Wikipedia's quality ranges from excellent to atrocious, but millions of people use it every day despite its flaws. We can use our expertise to make it better, especially if by doing so we can steer people to our unique resources. The idea is not a new one; it was proposed by librarians at the University of Washington several years ago.27 At Auburn University, we have started adding links to our digital collections to Alabama-related articles in Wikipedia. It doesn't take long: a few minutes per link, with a note for the editing history explaining why it was added. Out of curiosity, I recently checked the Wikipedia entry on Osip Mandel'shtam to see whether the online finding aid to his papers at the Princeton University Library was among the external links at the bottom of the article.²⁸ It wasn't, so I logged in to Wikipedia and added it. It took maybe five minutes.

Similarly, libraries and museums have started posting their digital collections to Flickr Commons,²⁹ a special section of the image-hosting Web site reserved for historical photograph collections and, increasingly, other digital images from cultural-memory organizations around the world. Among the institutions represented there are the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, the Smithsonian Institution, the National Archives UK, the Imperial War Museum, the LSE Library, the Australian War Memorial, the

National Library of New Zealand, and the National Library of Scotland. In a presentation at the Society of American Archivists 2009 annual meeting in Austin, Texas, Deborah Wythe, Head of Digital Collections and Services at the Brooklyn Museum, described how posting materials to the Commons has made the museum's digital collections more visible. She recounted how, while analyzing usage statistics, she noticed that a specific image had been viewed only one time on the museum's Web site. She then checked the Flickr statistics. The same image had been viewed almost 6,000 times in the museum's Flickr photostream during the same period.³⁰

Most Slavic librarians are academic librarians, and working directly with faculty members is a big part of their jobs. At Auburn, we are trying to persuade teaching faculty to incorporate our digital collections into their courses. We have had some success using Omeka, a freely available 'Web-based, Web publishing platform for all kinds of collections-based research' developed at the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University.³¹ The Omeka Web site offers a video tour and examples of how it is being used. Two of the showcased Omeka projects – 'Gulag: Many Days, Many Lives' ³² and 'Making the History of 1989: The Fall of Communism in Eastern Europe' ³³ – were produced by Slavic scholars and include primary source material, essays, and video interviews.

Digital Preservation

If the first decade of the 21st century was the decade of mass digitization, the second decade looks likely to become the decade of digital preservation. Digital preservation is the flipside of digital collection-building. Like many things having to do with infrastructure, it is invisible, unglamorous, and absolutely necessary. Although precise figures are hard to come by, it is generally recognized that most of the world's information is currently being produced in digital form, not as print documents or analogue artifacts. This poses a serious challenge to libraries, archives, museums, and other cultural memory organizations, as well as government agencies. Unlike their analogue counterparts, digital files are inherently susceptible to decay, destruction, and disappearance. Given the vulnerability of digital content to fires, floods, hurricanes, power blackouts, cyber attacks, and a variety of hardware and software failures, cultural memory organizations need to begin incorporating long-term digital preservation services for locally created digital content into their routine operations, or risk losing that

content irrevocably. The advent of a 'digital dark age' is not just a clever conceit; it is a real danger.

A number of countries have recognized the challenge and embarked on ambitious digital preservation programmes at the national level. In the United States, the Library of Congress initiated the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP) almost ten years ago, and recently launched the National Digital Stewardship Alliance (NDSA).³⁴ In the United Kingdom, the Digital Curation Centre (DCC) of the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) provides a national focus for digital preservation issues.³⁵ Similar initiatives are underway in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and other European countries.

Several lessons have already emerged from these initiatives. One of them concerns the importance of collaboration among institutions, states, and even countries. In digital preservation, as in many other endeavours, there is strength in numbers. With numbers comes complexity, however, and comprehensive digital preservation programmes inevitably raise difficult technical, administrative, financial, and even legal questions. That said, these questions are not unresolvable. Indeed, they are being resolved, or successfully addressed, by a number of preservation programmes in the United States, Canada, and other countries. There is a growing body of experience that shows that it is possible to build technically and administratively robust digital preservation networks across institutional and geographical borders without compromising those networks' long-term viability through excessive complexity and cost.

One especially promising approach combines Distributed Digital Preservation (DDP) with LOCKSS ('Lots Of Copies Keep Stuff Safe') software in so-called Private LOCKSS Networks (PLNs). As its name implies, DDP is based on the idea of distributing copies of digital files to server computers at geographically dispersed locations in order to maximize their chances of surviving a natural or man-made disaster, power failure, or other disruption. DDP networks consist of multiple preservation sites, selected with the following principles in mind:

- Sites preserving the same content should not be within a 75–125-mile radius of one another;
- Preservation sites should be distributed beyond the typical pathways of natural disasters, such as hurricanes, typhoons, and tornadoes;
- Preservation sites should be distributed across different power grids;

- Preservation sites should be under the control of different systems administrators;
- Content preserved in disparate sites should be on live media and should be checked on a regular basis for bit-rot and other issues; and
- Content should be replicated at least three times in accordance with the principles detailed above.³⁶

LOCKSS was developed and is currently maintained at the Stanford University Libraries. It is ideally suited for use in DDP networks. Originally designed to harvest, cache, and preserve digital copies of journals for academic libraries, LOCKSS is also effective at harvesting, caching, and preserving multiple copies of locally created digital content for cultural memory organizations in general. LOCKSS servers (also called LOCKSS boxes, LOCKSS caches, and LOCKSS nodes) typically perform the following functions:

- They collect content from target Web sites using a Web crawler similar to those used by search engines;
- They continually compare the content they have collected with the same content collected by other LOCKSS boxes, and repair any differences;
- They act as a Web proxy or cache, providing browsers in the library's community with access to the publisher's content or the preserved content as appropriate; and
- They provide a Web-based administrative interface that allows the library staff to target new content for preservation, monitor the state of the content being preserved, and control access to the preserved content.³⁷

Although LOCKSS is open-source software and therefore theoretically available for further development by the open-source community, in practice its design and development have been confined to the LOCKSS team at Stanford.

Auburn University is a founding member of and a current participant in two LOCKSS-based distributed digital preservation networks: the MetaArchive Cooperative,³⁸ which began in 2004 under the auspices of the Library of Congress' National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program (NDIIPP);³⁹ and the Alabama Digital Preservation Network (ADPNet),⁴⁰ a statewide preservation network which began in 2006 with a two-year grant from a federal funding agency in the United States.

The MetaArchive Cooperative is an independent, international membership association administered by the Educopia Institute, based in Atlanta, Georgia. The Cooperative's purpose is to support, promote, and extend the MetaArchive approach to distributed digital preservation practices. The Cooperative is responsible for preserving member organizations' content in a decentralized, distributed preservation network consisting of subject- and genre-based archives (e.g. Southern Digital Culture, Electronic Theses and Dissertations, etc.), as well as maintaining and extending its methodology and approach to distributed digital preservation. MetaArchive is growing quickly and currently has seventeen member institutions in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Brazil. The Cooperative doubled its membership in 2009 and hopes to add more members in 2010. MetaArchive is also engaged in exploratory work with several statewide digitization efforts to build a new preservation network and infrastructure that is based on the model of a 'preservation hub'. The network currently has 16 terabytes of storage at each of the member institutions and has harvested over 700 archival units totalling almost three terabytes.

The Alabama Digital Preservation Network (ADPNet) is a statewide digital preservation network that serves cultural memory organizations in Alabama. ADPNet currently has seven members: the Alabama Department of Archives & History in Montgomery, Auburn University, Spring Hill College in Mobile, Troy University in Troy, the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, the University of Alabama in Birmingham, and the University of North Alabama in Florence. Inspired in large part by Auburn University's experience with MetaArchive, the Alabama network began in 2006 with a two-year National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS). The grant provided support for equipment and associated expenses to the seven participating institutions; crucially, it also covered those institutions' annual membership fees in the LOCKSS Alliance for the same period. For their part, the participating institutions split the equipment costs with the IMLS and contributed staff time and other inhouse resources to the project. A LOCKSS staff member was assigned to the project to provide technical support and guidance. The IMLS grant ended in September 2008, and ADPNet is now a self-sustaining, member-managed DDP network operating under the auspices of the Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (NAAL), a department of the Alabama Commission on Higher Education in Montgomery. All seven member institutions have contributed content to the network, and over one hundred archival units

totalling almost one terabyte have been harvested to date. The network plans to harvest several terabytes of new content by the end of 2010.

Auburn University's experience with MetaArchive and especially with ADPNet suggests that LOCKSS-based distributed digital preservation networks are a relatively simple and affordable way to preserve locally created digital content, regardless of the type of institution or the nature of the content to be preserved. If a group of institutions in one of the poorest states in the United States (according to the U.S. Census Bureau, Alabama ranked 47th out of 51 states and territories in median household income in 2008 ⁴¹) can set up and sustain a collaborative digital preservation network, other institutions can do it too. Librarians and archivists who are considering embarking on such a project would be well advised to download and read a copy of the *Guide to Distributed Digital Preservation* (GDDP), the MetaArchive Cooperative's first book – it was published earlier this year by the Educopia Institute in Atlanta, Georgia – and the first comprehensive guide to the subject. The *Guide* is available for free, in PDF form, from the MetaArchive Web site, under 'Publications'.⁴²

Is DDP a realistic preservation option for Slavic digital collections? Obviously, I think the answer is yes, and believe that some form of distributed digital preservation is not only realistic, but necessary for the field. In an article published in the journal Slavic & East European Information Resources (SEEIR), I argued that Slavic libraries should set up their own digital preservation network on the MetaArchive-ADPNet model.⁴³ I've recently learned that the East Coast Consortium for Slavic Collections, a consortium of academic libraries in the northeast and mid-Atlantic regions of the United States, is engaged in an effort to harvest and preserve selected e-journals in the regular LOCKSS network - that is, the original LOCKSS network that was set up for precisely that purpose. That's commendable, but I think the next step should be to set up a Private LOCKSS Network for harvesting and preserving local digital content created by the consortium members themselves. The same thing goes for other groups of Slavic libraries in the United States – and, indeed, in other countries. There is plenty of material that needs to be preserved. It seems likely that most of the 200 or so digital collections listed in The Inventory of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Digital Projects at the University of Illinois Library at Urbana-Champaign are in danger of damage or loss. They would therefore be excellent candidates for the solution I am proposing here. Apart from its other benefits, distributed digital preservation also offers attractive opportunities for inter-

national collaboration. Geographic separation of LOCKSS nodes is one of the core principles of DDP, and the more far-flung the LOCKSS servers are, the more survivable the network will be. In this connection, I should mention that the U.S. Library of Congress is working with the MetaArchive Cooperative, ADPNet, and libraries in other countries to encourage collaboration and coordination among digital preservation networks in different parts of the world. This initiative has already produced an international conference on aligning national approaches to digital preservation that took place at the National Library of Estonia in Tallinn in May 2011.⁴⁴ We hope that this is the first of a series of conferences devoted to this work.⁴⁵

I wrote at the beginning of this article that I intended to offer both suggestions and exhortations. Here are three of the latter. First, collaborate with other institutions, including institutions in other countries. There is strength in numbers, and projects that are beyond one institution's capacities may be feasible if five or six others can be persuaded to participate. Inter-institutional collaboration is not a low-maintenance activity – it requires regular tending – but it is the only way to get a digital preservation network going. It also is regarded favourably by funding agencies. Second, get to know your library technology staff. If you haven't paid a visit to your library's technology department, make some time to meet and discuss ideas for projects. It doesn't have to be a formal meeting – in fact, informal may be better, at least to start with. Finally, get out more. Specifically, get out of the Slavic ghetto once in a while and take in a conference with a strong technology focus.

Conclusion

In a presentation I gave at a conference in Kraków fifteen years ago with the now-quaint title 'Slavic Librarianship and the World-Wide Web',⁴⁶ I argued that the opportunities created by the new digital technologies outweighed the problems. I still believe that. I don't know what the future of Slavic librarianship in the digital era will be, although I'm pretty sure that as long as Slavic studies exists as an academic discipline there will be a specialized branch of librarianship to support it. What I have tried to do here is suggest some ways of using digital technology to enrich our work. Doing so may not ensure our survival as a profession, but it will make what we do more enjoyable – and, I believe, more useful to more people.

Endnotes

- ¹ This is an edited and expanded version of a paper presented at the 41st national convention of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) in Boston, Massachusetts in November 2009. The author would like to thank Michael Brewer of the University of Arizona Libraries and Erik Zitser of the Duke University Libraries for the invitation to speak at that conference.
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