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ETHICAL ISSUES IN THE DIGITIZATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

Introduction

Traditionally, one of the main goals of professional ethics is to pursue explicitly defined values and norms and discourage inappropriate behavior by professionals in order to develop public trust in services delivered by certain institutions.¹ Change encourages specialists to develop new ways to pursue professional values. Archives, libraries, and museums have been actively engaged in the digitization of cultural heritage for several decades. Digitization projects have generated new organizational forms and collaborative networks, as well as new types of cultural heritage services, and are clearly the cause of a number of changes in mind-set, strategies, and processes in these institutions. Abundant case studies and research on particular ethical issues prove that digitization has had a significant impact on managing online engagement with heritage collections, ensuring confidentiality of personal information in heritage documents, ensuring authenticity, organizing access to heritage objects, and carrying out selection and interpretation.² New professional practices in digitization have resulted in new ethical challenges.

The ethics of digitization is not considered a separate field of scholarly and professional discussion, although occasional publications of a broader scope recognize that there are specific

¹ G. de Stexhe and J. Verstraeten, eds., *Matter of Breath: Foundations for Professional Ethics* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000).

² For managing online engagement with heritage collections, see C. L. Liew and F. Cheetham, “Participatory Culture in Memory Institutions: Of Diversity, Ethics and Trust?,” *D-Lib Magazine* 22, nos. 7–8 (2016), <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july16/liew/07liew.html>; A. S. Wong, “Ethical Issues of Social Media in Museums: A Case Study,” *Museum Management and Curatorship* 26, no. 2 (2011): 97–112; J. Taylor and L. K. Gibson, “Digitization, Digital Interaction and Social Media: Embedded Barriers to Democratic Heritage,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23, no. 5 (2016): 1–13. On ensuring confidentiality, see A. J. Gilliland and J. A. Wiener, “Digitizing and Providing Access to Privacy-Sensitive Historical Medical Resources: A Legal and Ethical Overview,” *Journal of Electronic Resources in Medical Libraries* 8, no. 4 (2011): 382–403; A. Talke, “Online News and Privacy: Are Online News Archives Affected by a ‘Right to Be Forgotten’?,” *IFLA WLIC 2016—Columbus, OH, 2016*, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://library.ifla.org/1517/1/090-talke-en.pdf>. On authenticity, see G. Were, “Digital Heritage in a Melanesian Context: Authenticity, Integrity and Ancestrality from the Other Side of the Digital Divide,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 21, no. 2 (2015): 153–65; M. Hand, *Making Digital Cultures: Access, Interactivity, and Authenticity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008); A. Lazet, “The Unexplored Ethics of Copywork Image Manipulation,” *VRA Bulletin* 43, no. 1 (2016): 1–8; M. J. Gorzalski, “Archivists and Thespians: A Case Study and Reflections on Context and Authenticity in a Digitization Project,” *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 161–85. On organizing access to heritage objects, see S. R. Winn, “Ethics of Access in Displaced Archives,” *Provenance: Journal of the Society of Georgia Archivists* 33, no. 1 (2015): 6–13; M. Pickover, “Patrimony, Power and Politics: Selecting, Constructing and Preserving Digital Heritage Content in South Africa and Africa,” *IFLA Library*, August 16–22, 2014, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://library.ifla.org/1023/1/138-pickover-en.pdf>; J. Britz and P. Lor, “A Moral Reflection on the Digitization of Africa’s Documentary Heritage,” *IFLA Journal* 30, no. 3 (2004): 216–23; K. Fouseki and K. Vacharopoulou, “Digital Museum Collections and Social Media: Ethical Considerations of Ownership and Use,” *Journal of Conservation and Museum Studies* 11, no. 1 (2013): Article 5, 1–10. On selection and interpretation, see Pickover, “Patrimony, Power, and Politics”; Taylor and Gibson, “Digitization”; K. Christen, “Opening Archives: Respectful Repatriation,” *The American Archivist* 74, no. 1 (2011): 185–210; and H. Whaanga et al., “He Matapihi Mā Mua, Mō Muri: The Ethics, Processes, and Procedures Associated with the Digitization of Indigenous Knowledge—the Pei Jones Collection,” *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly* 53, nos. 5–6 (2015): 520–47.

ethical issues faced in digitization projects.³ Many papers dealing with ethical issues in digitization are motivated by implicit assumptions or explicit understandings that well-established approaches to ethics in professional communities of archivists, librarians, and museum professionals do not work in the digitization of cultural heritage.⁴ So, it is necessary to make the ethical issues of digitization visible and to reflect on current discussions in this field. Such a discussion can be useful in:

- Searching for and establishing working solutions to ethical issues in digitization.
- Clearly relating ethical issues in digitization to the role of archives, libraries, and museums and to the approaches of general professional ethics.
- Understanding how ethical issues can influence the management of heritage digitization.

The main objective of this paper is to determine what ethical issues arise in cultural heritage digitization and how they affect the ways decisions are taken and processes are organized in digitization. In order to discuss the ethical dimensions of digitization, it is important to provide a clear definition. UNESCO offers a definition of digitization that connects it to the wider context of the decisions and activities of memory institutions:

Digitization is the creation of digital objects from physical, analogue originals by means of a scanner, camera or other electronic device. It is undertaken as part of a process that includes: selection, assessment, including of needs, prioritization, preparation of originals for digitization, metadata collection and creation, digitization and creation of data collections, submission of digital resources to delivery systems and repositories. This process is accompanied along the way by management, including intellectual property rights management and quality control, and evaluation at the end.⁵

This discussion will employ this definition, and consider the ethical issues that emerge at all stages of digitization.

Ethical issues in the digitization carried out by archives, libraries, and museums have been identified by literature review. The umbrella term “memory institutions” is used throughout the discussion to highlight the common purpose of the institutions that aim to manage cultural heritage collections in order to satisfy societies’ needs to remember. Similarities in the purpose and function of these institutions have been previously pointed out by a number of researchers, including Bates, Buckland, and Hjørland.⁶ While recognizing the differences in professional approaches to cultural heritage in archives, libraries, and museums, this paper focuses on the

³ C. G. Anderson, *Ethical Decision-Making for Digital Libraries* (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2006).

⁴ R. Leopold, “Articulating Culturally Sensitive Knowledge Online: A Cherokee Case Study,” *Museum Anthropology Review* 7, nos. 1–2 (2013): 85–104; Whaanga et al., “He Matapihi Mā Mua”; Winn, “Ethics of Access”; Christen, “Opening Archives.”

⁵ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), “Fundamental Principles of Digitization of Documentary Heritage,” *UNESCO.org*, accessed February 11, 2017, http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/digitization_guidelines_for_web.pdf.

⁶ M. Bates, “The Information Professions: Knowledge, Memory, Heritage,” *Information Research: An International Electronic Journal* 20, no. 1 (2015); M. K. Buckland, “Information as Thing,” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science (1986–1998)* 42, no. 5 (1991): 351–60; B. Hjørland, “Documents, Memory Institutions and Information Science,” *Journal of Documentation* 56, no. 1 (2000): 27–41.

possibility of learning from the discussion of common ethical issues and solutions in digitization. The discussion is supported by documents and international codes of ethics from archives, libraries, and museums, as well as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Changes Brought by Digitization and Related Ethical Issues

The literature review identified several areas of concern related to digitization that cause ethical issues and conflicts. Some of them, for instance the emergence of digital community archives, represent contextual factors that have stimulated changes in approaches to digitization in memory institutions. Others, such as new funding models in digitization, are directly related to methods of digitization management that have introduced new ethical issues to the agenda of memory institutions. Still others include the ease of sharing and manipulation of digital content and online engagement with heritage in a global digital environment and reflect the impact of digital technologies on the ways heritage objects are processed and communicated in the digital space.

The topic of digitization ethics is very broad and includes discussion of changes in attitude, issues that have not been solved, and examples of practical solutions, so the overview and reflections provided in this paper are inevitably incomplete.

Emergence of Digital Community Archives

The growing accessibility of easy-to-learn and relatively cheap digitization tools and the rise of Web 2.0 encouraged amateur digitization and the emergence of alternative non-professional digital archives maintained by individuals and various communities. Social groups and societies that once were marginalized or persecuted—indigenous communities; minorities in terms of religion, race, sexual orientation, or gender identity; and countries that were formerly colonized have used online digital collections as a platform for making their voice heard and/or to regain control over their heritage.⁷ The past of these groups has been represented in archives, libraries, and museums through the lens of dominant, powerful social groups or societies. These shortcomings encouraged so-called “community archives” or “independent archives” movements when organizations and communities began creating and curating digital collections independent of state archives, libraries, and museums.⁸

Indigenous communities have been using digitization to regain control over traditional cultural knowledge that is excessively commercialized and used without the consent of the communities where it originated. The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) has encouraged indigenous communities to digitize their intangible heritage (e.g., songs, dance, rituals, etc.) because such assets are not protected by conventional intellectual property systems.⁹ Such intangible heritage recorded by researchers has also appeared in the collections of archives,

⁷ A. J. Gilliland and S. McKemish, “The Role of Participatory Archives in Furthering Human Rights, Reconciliation and Recovery,” *Atlanti* 24, no. 1 (2014): 79–88.

⁸ A. Flinn, M. Stevens, and E. Shepherd, “Whose Memories, Whose Archives? Independent Community Archives, Autonomy and the Mainstream,” *Archival Science* 9, no. 1 (2009): 71–86.

⁹ World Intellectual Property Organization, “Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Traditional Cultural Expressions,” *WIPO.int*, 2015, accessed August 30, 2017, http://www.wipo.int/edocs/pubdocs/en/tk/933/wipo_pub_933.pdf.

libraries, and museums. Often the digitization, selection, and arrangement of such materials, as well as wide online access to them, conflict with the traditional views of indigenous communities.

The emergence of “community archives” and initiatives to protect indigenous heritage encouraged archives, libraries, and museums to grasp the relationship between cultural heritage and the worldviews of the societies and communities that create and practice it.¹⁰ This significantly challenged the traditional understanding of how the values of neutrality and objectivity should be pursued in managing and providing access to cultural content.¹¹ Digital community archives highlighted the issues of inequality, subjective judgment, discrimination, and so on that were caused by the decisions of memory institutions.¹² Originally shaped as institutions that were engaged in communicating the heritage of national states, memory institutions found themselves situated within a complex variety of memories and the heritage of different communities and groups that constitute our societies. It has been increasingly recognized that conflicting and contradictory interests, power relations, and political and legal contexts have a huge influence on the decisions taken by archives, libraries, and museums.¹³

With changes in the approach to community heritage the following biases in the digitization processes became obvious:

- Selection and interpretation of cultural heritage for digitization. In a discussion about the digitization of African heritage, Pickover reports selection biases and the predominantly “Western approach” to the past, especially when African collections held in overseas memory institutions are digitized. Pickover notes that often varied and contested views of the events of the past are not visible in digitization projects of African heritage.¹⁴ The approaches used by powerful social groups are relevant for other social groups (e.g.,

¹⁰ E. Waterton and S. Watson, “Heritage as a Focus of Research: Past, Present and New Directions,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*, ed. E. Waterson and S. Watson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 1–17; D. A. Wallace, “Introduction: Memory Ethics—or the Presence of the Past in the Present,” *Archival Science* 11, no. 1 (2011): 1–12.

¹¹ International Council of Museums, “ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums,” *ICOM.museum*, 2013, accessed February 11, 2017; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, “IFLA Code of Ethics for Librarians and Other Information Workers,” *IFLA.org*, 2012, accessed February 11, 2017, <http://www.ifla.org/publications/node/11092>; International Council of Archives, “Code of Ethics,” *ICA.org*, September 6, 1996, accessed February 11, 2017, http://www.ica.org/sites/default/files/ICA_1996-09-06_code%20of%20ethics_EN.pdf.

¹² S. Durrani and E. Smallwood, “The Professional Is Political: Redefining the Social Role of Public Libraries,” in *Questioning Library Neutrality: Essays from Progressive Librarian*, ed. Alison M. Lewis (Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2008), 157–71; T. Besterman, “Cultural Equity in the Sustainable Museum,” in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum*, ed. Janet Marstine (New York: Routledge, 2011), 239–55; A. J. Gilliland, ““Dead on Arrival”? Impartiality as a Measure of Archival Professionalism in the Twenty-First Century,” in *Values in Transition: Perspectives on the Future of the Archival Profession*, ed. H. van Engen, Royal Society of Archivists of the Netherlands (KVAN) (Los Angeles: University of California, 2016), accessed 2 October 2017, <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5m03n8cp>.

¹³ Wallace, “Introduction”; Besterman, “Cultural Equity”; J. B. Edwards, “Symbolic Possibilities,” in *Beyond Article 19—Libraries and Social and Cultural Rights*, ed. J. B. Edwards and S. P. Edwards (Duluth, MN: Litwin Books, 2010), 7–40.

¹⁴ Pickover, “Patrimony, Power and Politics.”

lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups; immigrants; victims of crimes or traumatic experiences of the past, etc.), as noted by researchers.¹⁵

- Application of metadata schemas that the “Western” world commonly uses to describe and arrange indigenous heritage. Concerning the digitization of indigenous heritage, Christen and Whaanga et al. indicate that metadata schemas used by memory institutions attempt to fit indigenous knowledge and spirituality into a “Western” worldview, which has a destructive impact on community culture and challenges its integrity.¹⁶ Again, issues of the arrangement of digital collections in accordance with predominant views are equally relevant to the heritage of other groups.¹⁷
- Providing access to digitized objects that are considered to be of limited use/access in a community. Some heritage objects are sacred and secret, and often access to specific heritage objects is restricted to persons of specific age or gender communities. Digitization and open access to such objects conflict with the worldview and traditions of the community. Neglecting community needs and values leads to reinforcing a discriminatory approach to the community that is the creator of this heritage.¹⁸

These biases conflict with the obligations of memory institutions to present multiple perspectives on the subject and to promote cultural diversity and dialogue. Understanding of these biases encourages memory institutions to realize that they should “protect indigenous traditional knowledge and local traditional knowledge *for the benefit of indigenous peoples* [italics mine] as well as for the benefit of the rest of the world.”¹⁹ Notably, these conflicts encouraged memory institutions to involve community members in selection, metadata and information systems development, and maintenance processes, making them equal partners in digitization. For instance, Whaanga et al. report on negotiation with representatives of indigenous communities and collective decision-making in selection, arrangement, description, and providing access to a donated cultural heritage collection.²⁰ Leopold provides a case study about negotiating the provision of online access to Cherokee Indian manuscripts containing spells and sacred formulas.²¹ Christen introduces the content management system Mukurtu, developed to address the needs of indigenous communities all over the world by ensuring different levels of access to heritage and sharing practices based on the worldviews of indigenous communities.²² Gilliland and McKemmish advocate the broader notion of a “participatory archive” that would involve multiple communities with different perspectives and worldviews in its development.²³

Work with the heritage of various communities is a very large field and progress in it is uneven. Most visible are the changes in approaches to indigenous communities. These are explicitly

¹⁵ Gilliland and McKemmish, “The Role of Participatory Archives.”

¹⁶ Christen, “Opening Archives”; Whaanga et al., “He Matapihi Mā Mua.”

¹⁷ Gilliland and McKemmish, “The Role of Participatory Archives.”

¹⁸ Christen, “Opening Archives”; Whaanga et al., “He Matapihi Mā Mua”; Leopold, “Articulating Culturally Sensitive Knowledge.”

¹⁹ International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, “IFLA Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge,” *IFLA.org*, 2014, accessed August 30, 2017, <https://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-statement-on-indigenous-traditional-knowledge>.

²⁰ Whaanga et al., “He Matapihi Mā Mua.”

²¹ Leopold, “Articulating Culturally Sensitive Knowledge.”

²² Christen, “Opening Archives.”

²³ Gilliland and McKemmish, “The Role of Participatory Archives.”

documented in codes of ethics and policy documents such as the “IFLA Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge” and the “IFLA/UNESCO Multicultural Library Manifesto.”²⁴ However, the progress in work with other type of communities and social groups is not so easily described.

New Funding Models in Digitization

The costs of digitization are high; therefore, most digitization initiatives depend on external funding and donor support.²⁵ To generate funds for digitization and to ensure sustainability of digitized content memory, institutions increasingly apply business approaches. Such approaches are based on the potential to use digitized heritage objects for developing commercial services and content. They include initiatives by memory institutions to charge for access to digitized content, partnership with private entities, and seeking the support of sponsors.²⁶ In these initiatives memory institutions pursue goals such as diminishing the burden of digitization costs, or acquiring funding, infrastructure, or competencies, while their commercial partners aim to reuse digitized content for delivery of commercial services or products.²⁷

The application of the business mind-set in the public sector raises two ethical issues—selection biases and limitation of access. First, in public and private collaborations, sponsorship donors and private sector partners influence selection and interpretation of the content to be digitized. Researchers reveal that donor/partner preferences may result in particular selection and interpretation decisions. Pickover reports that foreign funders of African digitization projects influence the interpretation of the digitized content.²⁸ Leopold highlights gender gaps in representation of the US Civil War that occurred due to donor funding preferences.²⁹ He asserts that memory institutions may find themselves selectively digitizing the content that appeals to potential funders.³⁰ Secondly, in pursuit of profit private partners who significantly contributed either financially or by performing digitization tasks sometimes insist on limiting access for a certain period (which may reach ten years of restricted online access). This raises ethical questions about the availability of digitized content, especially in case the project is partly financed by public funds (which means that the end user pays twice). Moreover, ethical issues emerge when memory institutions themselves would like to charge for the reuse of digitized content in public domain.³¹

The problem of combining private and public funding and coping with selection biases that result from donor support is not easily solved. However, memory institutions should accept the reality

²⁴ International Council of Museums, “ICOM Code of Ethics.”

²⁵ P. Conway, “Preservation in the Age of Google: Digitization, Digital Preservation, and Dilemmas,” *The Library Quarterly* 80, no. 1 (2010): 61–79.

²⁶ H. Verwayen, “Business Model Innovation in Digital Libraries—the Cultural Heritage Sector,” in *Business Planning for Digital Libraries: International Approaches*, ed. Mel Collier (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2010), 23–32.

²⁷ A. Kriesberg, “The Future of Access to Public Records? Public-Private Partnerships in US State and Territorial Archives,” *Archival Science* 17, no. 1 (2017): 5–25.

²⁸ Pickover, “Patrimony, Power, and Politics.”

²⁹ Leopold, “Articulating Culturally Sensitive Knowledge.”

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ E. Niggemann, J. de Decker, and M. Lévy, “The New Renaissance,” *European Commission*, January 10, 2011, accessed February 11, 2017, http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=6580.

that digitization is expensive and that it is impossible to rely solely on public funds.³² A widespread solution applied in memory institutions is to separate revenue-generating activities from publicly funded digitization initiatives. For instance, the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the British Library established commercial subsidiaries to engage in commercial activities to support the digitization of cultural heritage.³³ Such solutions make it possible to avoid confusing the commitments of a public institution with the priorities of generating revenue to fund digitization.

Ease of Sharing and Manipulation of Digital Content

Unlike traditional heritage objects held in memory institutions, digital cultural content can be easily shared, combined, and aggregated online; the content of digital files can be easily modified as well. These features provide a number of benefits for users of digitized content in enhancing access to digital collections and allowing their reuse for the purposes of research, learning, and developing new commercial content. However, the ease of sharing and introducing changes to digital files complicates the task of protecting personal information contained in digitized documents and ensuring their trustworthiness.

Obligations to respect personal privacy are explicitly documented in the professional codes of ethics of memory institutions and in Article 12 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that “*no one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation.*”³⁴ However, often privacy issues conflict with the aim of providing universal access to heritage online.

Privacy issues in digitization emerge due to the abundance of personal information in cultural heritage documents and objects and to unprecedented opportunities for online access, discovery, and combination of personal data from various sources in the digital age.³⁵ Among examples of personal information are ethnographic materials with intimate details, opinions, references to other persons and life-events made by informants; medical records; archival records containing data about individuals; newspapers, and so on. In many cases online access was not envisioned and thus was not negotiated with informants and donors of heritage materials.³⁶

A new dimension of privacy in the digital space—the right to be forgotten—makes the process of finding solutions to ethical privacy issues even more complicated. The right to be forgotten is a recent concept that was introduced to the European Union General Data Protection Regulation in 2016. It enables a person to withdraw information from the Internet or make that information anonymous, and thus allows an individual to control personal information online.³⁷ The right to

³² Conway, “Preservation in the Age of Google.”

³³ IMPACT, “Public Private Partnership Funding,” *Digitization.eu*, accessed August 30, 2017, <https://www.digitization.eu/community/project-proposals-corner/public-private-partnership-funding/>.

³⁴ International Council of Museums, “ICOM Code of Ethics”; International Federation, “IFLA Code of Ethics”; International Council of Archives, “Code of Ethics.”

³⁵ C. de Terwangne, “The Right to Be Forgotten and Information Autonomy in the Digital Environment,” in *The Ethics of Memory in a Digital Age: Interrogating the Right to be Forgotten*, ed. A. Ghezzi, Â. Pereira, and L. Vesnic-Alujevic (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 82–101.

³⁶ Gilliland and Wiener, “Digitizing and Providing Access.”

³⁷ Terwangne, “The Right to Be Forgotten.”

be forgotten resonates with issues of manipulating or destroying the past that arise when records and documents are withdrawn and deleted.³⁸ Most practical discussions on ethical concerns of privacy and the right to be forgotten highlight the need to create a proper balance between access to benefit the public interest for research and protection of persons who are mentioned, displayed, or express their opinions in heritage documents.³⁹ The statements by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) on personally identifiable information in historical records and the right to be forgotten demonstrate that the values of intellectual freedom and access remain guiding principles for memory institutions' professionals; however, consideration of the possible impact of digitized collections to living persons has been acknowledged.⁴⁰

Importantly, digitization case studies show that memory institution professionals have become more sensitive to the consequences and harm that widespread online access can bring to personal lives. They have discussed digitization initiatives in which individual cases are subject to review, have carefully evaluated the possible harm to persons, and have designed information systems that allow different levels of access.⁴¹ Recent discussions of controversial digitization cases also demonstrate a caring attitude toward persons whose information is reflected in heritage documents. For instance, digitization by an alternative press of lesbian erotic content from 1984–2004 that bears historical significance but could be harmful for living persons exposed in the journal was reported in several publications. It generated a debate in professional American library and archival journals and in the popular press.⁴² Though valuable for research and understanding of the past, such documents can harm their subjects—for instance, they can reveal information about their views, crimes, or socially unacceptable past events in their lives.⁴³

Identifying and protecting personal information in large-scale digitization initiatives remains a challenging task. It requires establishing new policies, practices, and workflows to be able to balance the right to be forgotten with other rights, such as intellectual freedom. The lack of clarity regarding how to implement the right to be forgotten may become a significant challenge in digitization projects in Europe.⁴⁴

³⁸ Terwangne, "The Right to Be Forgotten"; Talke, "Online News and Privacy."

³⁹ J. Emery, T. Robertson, and P. Glahn, "Heard on the Net: Developing the Balance of Discovery and Respect with Primary Resources," *The Charleston Advisor* 18, no. 2 (2016): 65–68; G. O. Cleircín, C. M. Eacháin, and A. Bale, "Managing the Digitization and Online Publication of Sensitive Heritage Material in the Dúchas Project," *New Review of Information Networking* 20, nos. 1–2 (2015): 194–99; Cleircín, Eacháin, and Bale, "Managing the Digitization"; E. Chenier, "Privacy Anxieties: Ethics versus Activism in Archiving Lesbian Oral History Online," *Radical History Review*, no. 122 (2015): 129–41.

⁴⁰ International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, "IFLA Statement on Access to Personally Identifiable Information in Historical Records," *IFLA.org*, 2008, accessed August 30, 2017, <https://www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-statement-on-access-to-personally-identifiable-information-in-historical-records>; "IFLA Statement on the Right to Be Forgotten," *IFLA.org*, 2016, accessed August 30, 2017, <https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/10320>.

⁴¹ Cleircín, Eacháin, and Bale, "Managing the Digitization"; Chenier, "Privacy Anxieties."

⁴² P. Brink, M. E. Ducey, and E. Lorang. "The Case of the Awgwan: Considering Ethics of Digitisation and Access for Archives," *The Reading Room* 2, no. 1 (2016): 7–25; Emery, Robertson, and Glahn, "Heard on the Net."

⁴³ Gilliland, "Dead on Arrival?"; Chenier, "Privacy Anxieties."

⁴⁴ Talke, "Online News and Privacy."

Another ethical challenge associated with the easy manipulation, copying, and repurposing of digital surrogates is related to ensuring that digitized content is authentic. Authenticity is defined as the “quality in a thing of being what it is claimed to be (valid, real, genuine, etc.), verified in archives and special collections through an investigative process known as authentication.”⁴⁵ Commitment to ensuring authenticity is explicitly described in the International Council of Archives (ICA) code of ethics, which states that “archivists should protect the authenticity of documents during archival processing, preservation, and use.”⁴⁶ Additionally, the IFLA code of ethics for librarians and information professionals emphasizes the obligation of transparency in providing information, while the International Council of Museums (ICOM) code of ethics describes the obligations of museums as institutions holding primary evidence.⁴⁷ Ensuring authenticity is closely related to the authority and trustworthiness of archives, libraries, and museums.⁴⁸ The concept of authenticity guides the selection, digital conversion, and preservation decisions of archival, library, and museum professionals.

Digital enhancements of heritage materials can make them more convenient to use; however, they also pose challenges to maintaining the document/object’s authenticity in its traditional meaning. Researchers and practitioners are concerned with the influence of specific configurations of digital conversion hardware and software, data compression methods, and post-conversion enhancements to comprehension of original heritage materials in digital form.⁴⁹ Digitization guidelines recommend creating an archival master file that does not contain interventions to enhance user experience.⁵⁰ However, most users never get access to the archival master file; therefore, transparent publicly accessible information about digitization policy in a memory institution as well as educating users (especially scholars) about authenticity issues in a digital environment seems to be one of the appropriate solutions.⁵¹ Additionally, the digital surrogate does not reflect all the features of the original heritage documents or objects; therefore, it is often neither affordable nor rational to aim for the maximum quality of digital conversion. Therefore, ethical issues of defining the requirements for the authenticity of digitized content have not yet been resolved.⁵² And finally, to preserve digitized content in the long term and to overcome the technological obsolescence of hardware and software, changes to digital files should be introduced. This also causes issues of authenticity. To solve them, memory institutions introduce different models of certification for repositories of digital materials and monitoring of digital preservation processes.⁵³

⁴⁵ J. M. Reitz, “ODLIS—Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science,” *ABC-CLIO.com*, last updated 2013, accessed August 30, 2017, http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_about.aspx.

⁴⁶ International Council of Archives, “Code of Ethics.”

⁴⁷ International Federation, “Code of Ethics”; International Council of Museums, “Code of Ethics.”

⁴⁸ Conway, “Preservation in the Age of Google.”

⁴⁹ Lazet, “Unexplored Ethics”; Conway, “Preservation in the Age of Google.”

⁵⁰ International Federation, “IFLA Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge”; International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives, “The Safeguarding of the Audio Heritage: Ethics, Principles and Preservation Strategy,” *IASA-web.org*, IASA-TC 03, December 2005, accessed August 30, 2017, https://www.iasa-web.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publications/TC03_English.pdf.

⁵¹ P. Conway, “Building Meaning in Digitized Photographs,” *Journal of the Chicago Colloquium on Digital Humanities and Computer Science* 1, no. 1 (2009): 1–18.

⁵² Conway, “Preservation in the Age of Google.”

⁵³ D. Giaretta, *Advanced Digital Preservation* (New York: Springer, 2011).

Additionally, new approaches to authenticity emerge in digitization initiatives.⁵⁴ Were offers an experiential approach to authenticity in a case study of the digitization of wooden carvings used in funeral rituals by a Melanesian tribe.⁵⁵ Here authenticity is understood as a condition unique to a human being (or a group) that expresses distinctive features that represent their nature and make him/her/them different from others.⁵⁶ Seen in this light, heritage objects are mediators that connect people with past events or practices that evoke authentic experiences. Authenticity is not an intrinsic feature of a heritage object, but it lies in the experiences that might be stimulated using heritage objects. Through repeated cooperative work with the tribal community Were established that the wooden carvings were useful to reconnect with the past and transmit the tradition of funeral rituals as an important part of the tribe's identity. Made for a deceased person, funeral carvings were destroyed at the end of the funeral ritual, so preservation of and exposure to original objects seemed dangerous to the tribal community, while digitization offered a safe way of sustaining funeral traditions. This observation led to making three-dimensional digitized models of the carvings with specific hotspots on their surface to allow a detailed examination of various elements.⁵⁷ In a case study of theater heritage digitization, Gorzalski also challenged the traditional notion of authenticity.⁵⁸ In a digitization project of scene designs by Darwin Reid Payne, Gorzalski faced the dilemma of including scene models digitally rendered by the artist himself to reflect the look and feel of the design on the stage.⁵⁹ On the one hand, the digital file could not be considered authentic in traditional terms, because it contained digital enhancements and alterations and they were made during digitization, that is, much later than the design was created. On the other hand, the original model photographs failed to convey many features of the scene design as a part of the performance (for example lighting, poses of actors, etc.) that were crucial for learning and teaching on the subject. Two conflicting perspectives on authenticity emerged: in the eyes of the archivist it rested in creating a trustworthy digital surrogate of the original photograph, while the artist aimed to convey his authentic idea. An inquiry into the preservation of such ephemeral artistic works as performances from the theatrical perspective of authenticity raised a number of questions about the suitability of traditional approaches to authenticity in some digital humanities settings.

Both cases identify assumptions about authenticity and the conflicts that emerge by ensuring authenticity in its usual meaning. As noted by MacNeil and Mak, who argue that the notion of authenticity is a social construction, authenticity is embedded in a set of established and agreed practices.⁶⁰ The exposure of memory institutions professionals to the needs and practices of certain communities can yield insight about what makes an object or a document authentic in specific contexts of use. Currently, professionals in memory institutions face the need to establish new processes and practices to ensure authenticity in a digital environment.⁶¹

Online Engagement with Heritage in a Global Digital Environment

⁵⁴ Gorzalski, "Archivists and Thespians"; Were, "Digital Heritage."

⁵⁵ Were, "Digital Heritage."

⁵⁶ H. MacNeil and B. Mak, "Constructions of Authenticity," *Library Trends* 56, no. 1 (2007): 26–52.

⁵⁷ Were, "Digital Heritage."

⁵⁸ Gorzalski, "Archivists and Thespians."

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ MacNeil and Mak, "Constructions of Authenticity."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Commitment to the values of intellectual freedom, including “*the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers,*” as stated in Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, serves as guidance to digitization projects, and a similar value of access is stated in the professional codes of the ICA, IFLA, and ICOM.⁶² Most digitization projects are aimed primarily at expanding access and use by publishing content online. Although digitization offered a promise of universal access to heritage information, on a global scale it resulted in new types of inequalities and conflicts between different approaches to the past that emerged in different national frameworks. Digitization and use of social media for participatory interaction of users with cultural heritage collections also requires significant changes in approach to heritage communication in memory institutions.

On a global scale, digitization provides an opportunity to “virtually return” cultural heritage that was displaced from the communities and nations that created it because of colonization, armed conflicts, natural disasters, and so on.⁶³ This opportunity resulted in digitization of displaced heritage collections that created new inequalities. Often the communities that should benefit from such projects cannot access these heritage collections due to barriers created by memory institutions. In discussing the digitization of displaced archives, Winn reports that the use by memory institutions of their own languages in descriptive information about digitized content prevents users from communities that created the heritage resources from using it.⁶⁴ Similarly, Britz and Lor, Pickover, Leopold, and Rose indicate the limitations of access caused by subscription fees, absence of well-developed technical infrastructure in user communities, and failure to adjust projects to the context of the lives of persons who are supposed to benefit from access to the digitized collections.⁶⁵ Often the level of comprehension of information and communication technologies, the level of skill and opportunities to acquire it, and the habits of using digital tools in the beneficiary communities are not considered at all.⁶⁶ The sustainability of digitization projects of displaced heritage is also often in question. Memory institutions function under the frameworks of national policies and funding, where digitization and maintenance of “alien” heritage materials is often not a priority.⁶⁷ In this case, the perception of universal access made possible only by means of digital technologies is an illusion, because a set of complex power, financial, infrastructural, literacy, and other factors precondition availability of digital content. However, in this light, it is essential to emphasize the role of memory institutions as advocates of digital access to heritage on a global scale beyond national priorities and frameworks.

Social media has become a popular tool to ensure more inclusive, democratic, and engaging communication of digitized cultural heritage online.⁶⁸ The impact of Web 2.0 technologies has gone beyond the simple use of popular tools for participatory and collaborative approaches that

⁶² International Council of Museums, “Code of Ethics”; International Federation, “IFLA Code of Ethics”; International Council of Archives, “Code of Ethics.”

⁶³ Winn, “Ethics of Access.”

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Britz and Lor, “A Moral Reflection”; Pickover, “Patrimony, Power and Politics”; Leopold, “Articulating Culturally Sensitive Knowledge”; and L. Rose, “Critical Perspectives on Digitizing Africa,” in *Digitization Perspectives*, ed. R. Rikowski (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011): 179–88.

⁶⁶ Rose, “Critical Perspectives.”

⁶⁷ Winn, “Ethics of Access.”

⁶⁸ Gilliland and McKemish, “The Role of Participatory Archives.”

blurred the traditional boundaries between memory institution professionals and their users.⁶⁹ The rapid acceptance of Web 2.0 without more consideration of the in-depth changes needed to make it truly participatory has led to ethical issues. Some of them are associated with the lack of sustainable solutions for facilitating global communication on social media platforms and reconciling the right of freedom of opinion and expression with respect to persons and communities.⁷⁰ Others include concerns about the possible limitations to participation of users in cultural heritage communication processes.⁷¹

First, researchers have questioned a naïve technologically deterministic approach to social media, arguing that it is inclusive and democratic by definition.⁷² Without adopting the participatory philosophy in memory institutions, social media can create a biased communication space. For instance, Liew and Cheetham highlight that gaps in online cultural content where heritage and/or perspectives of some social groups are underrepresented may create biased interpretations; availability of specific tools and skills to upload, comment, and share content online to certain groups precondition their level of online engagement.⁷³

Second, availability of tools for commenting, sharing, and reusing content poses the question of the role of memory in facilitating these processes. On the one hand, with the rise of abusive comments and expressions of hatred, memory institutions feel the need to act as a moderator that can ensure that each community is respected.⁷⁴ On the other hand, practices of control are often based on subjective judgment and are not transparent.⁷⁵ Moderating multiple perspectives and opinions, especially in the case of trauma heritage, is also a very difficult part of implementing the concept of a participatory approach in practice.⁷⁶

Third, Web 2.0 significantly expanded the possibility for users to participate in shaping, interpreting, and disseminating digital heritage online. Memory institutions face issues of content ownership and authority because of the possibility of sharing and reusing digitized content. They report abuses in content reuse that have generated misleading comments or information.⁷⁷ However, memory institutions are often not ready for active user involvement in heritage communication. Fouseki and Vacharopoulou argue that memory institutions are *legitimized to own and promote collections for the public rather than with the public* and cite court cases where libraries and museums restricted the reuse of high quality digitized content by the third parties (e.g., Wikipedia, etc.).⁷⁸ Similarly, Taylor and Gibson report that memory institutions often tend to take a paternalistic role in defining what is to be communicated online and how, leaving the user with some opportunities to respond, but not to take an equal role in the cocreation and interpretation of the past.⁷⁹ Obviously, researchers recognize that these ethical issues emerge due

⁶⁹ N. Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, 2010, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/>.

⁷⁰ Wong, "Ethical Issues."

⁷¹ Liew and Cheetham, "Participatory Culture"; Taylor and Gibson, "Digitization."

⁷² Liew and Cheetham, "Participatory Culture"; Taylor and Gibson, "Digitization."

⁷³ Liew and Cheetham, "Participatory Culture."

⁷⁴ Wong, "Ethical Issues."

⁷⁵ Liew and Cheetham, "Participatory Culture."

⁷⁶ Gilliland and McKemmish, "The Role of Participatory Archives."

⁷⁷ Wong, "Ethical Issues."

⁷⁸ Fouseki and Vacharopoulou, "Digital Museum Collections."

⁷⁹ Taylor and Gibson, "Digitization."

to different and often conflicting conscious and latent motivations and perceptions of memory institutions' roles (e.g., expert/facilitator/co-curator, etc.) and responsibilities.⁸⁰

Conclusions

Discussions of ethical issues in digitization reflect fundamental changes, although uneven and often accompanied by challenges and failures, in the understanding of memory institutions' roles and how they fit into higher-level societal processes of remembering. Addressing the ethical challenges of digitization allows the professional to recognize the wider consequences of certain decisions and to revise major conceptions of the profession, thus (re)connecting digitization to the essential role of memory institutions in societies and humanizing and linking it to the lives and needs of real communities and people. Analysis of digitization ethics research and case studies reveals that memory institutions turn to participative approaches and engage in developing sustainable and transparent models for making digitization decisions together with the communities that have created and maintained heritage objects.

Memory institutions consider heritage objects and collections in the wider context of (re)constructing the past through multiple relationships and through the perspectives of people and communities involved in certain events and practices. This shift is demonstrated by attention to the impact of digitization on the lives/values/behavior/needs of specific communities and people and numerous instances of working for and with communities to develop methods of selecting, presenting, and organizing digitized heritage content online to provide richer, more dynamic, and inclusive engagement with the past. Such changes may positively influence the understanding of digitization goals in general and lead to the delivery of more engaging and meaningful digitized heritage services to users.

Ethical issues raised in digitization literature also indicate a more mature and informed approach to digital technologies and their effects on the part of archivists, librarians, and museum professionals. Most participants and researchers in digitization initiatives recognized both the socially inclusive and exclusive impact they might have. This is shown by questioning assumptions of the universal availability of digitized materials online; concerns about technologies being an instrument for reinforcing the domination of economically and politically powerful societies and groups; debates about the inclusiveness of social media, and recognition of the destructive consequences to human privacy caused by tools for complex searching and mass aggregation of personal content.

Becoming a participative institution that engages its stakeholders in making digitization decisions proved to be challenging to memory institutions. Realizing the ideal conception of a participative, responsive, and empathetic institution proved to be complicated in practice. This is related to the need to overcome latent and unconscious assumptions about the roles of memory institutions, difficulties in reconciling conflicting perspectives about the past, and limitations in ensuring the inclusivity of all groups in engagement with the past.

⁸⁰ Taylor and Gibson, "Digitization"; Liew and Cheetham, "Participatory Culture"; Fouseki and Vacharopoulou, "Digital Museum Collections."

And finally, the discussion proved that ethical issues influence decisions and the organization of processes at different stages of digitization, from selection and organization of information to developing information systems and online communication of digitized content. Ethical issues are likely to affect general organization as well as the duration and cost of digitization issues in future.

Arguments provided above clearly indicate that a general agenda for digitization ethics is necessary to make the whole spectrum of ethical issues and activities affected by them visible and to develop effective solutions that are connected to the general roles and ethical practices of memory institutions.

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