



InterPARES Report

Team Europe EU28 Project 2015-16:
Perceptions of Born Digital Authenticity

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Document Control

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Abstract

Purpose: The primary rationale for the project was a desire to explore what it meant in terms of people's perceptions of documents as 'the real thing', that those documents were born-digital and were being kept and presented as digital archives of different kinds.

Design/methodology/approach: Nine semi-structured interviews were undertaken during which participants were asked to access and comment on four born-digital documents. In particular they were asked about their reactions to these documents in respect of their authenticity and the degree to which they thought they were 'the real thing'.

Findings: Analysis of the interview transcripts according to the chosen coding framework results in a focus on two overlapping themes; 'judgements of authenticity' and 'digital presence'. It is suggested that one way in which sense might be brought to and from the overlap is in terms of the conflation of now and then.

Research limitations/implications: A limited number of interviews were undertaken, and all those interviewed were trained or trainee 'information professionals'. The degree to which the perceptions of these individuals are representative of those of any other individuals is open to question.

Originality/value: The value of this study arises from the attention it pays to individual perspectives. Building from the ground up, it generates areas of focus for further investigation that offer potential for a deeper understanding of born digital authenticity.

Keywords: Born-digital; Authenticity; The real thing; Perception.

Table of contents

Abstract	3
Table of contents	4
1. Chapter One – Introduction	
1.1 Rationale	5
1.2 Methodology	5
1.3 Documents under consideration	7
2. Chapter Two – Data Analysis	
2.1 The real thing (TRT) coding framework	12
2.2 Self	14
2.3 Surround	16
2.4 Presence	18
2.5 Relation	23
3. Chapter Three – Conclusions and reflections	
3.1 Examination of results	28
3.2 Judgements of authenticity	28
3.3 Digital presence	31
3.4 Final reflections	32
Appendix A – Information sheet and consent form	34
Appendix B – Pre- Interview Questionnaire	36
Appendix C - Interview Schedule	37
Appendix D – ‘The Real Thing’ coding framework	38

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Rationale

The primary rationale for the project was a desire to explore what it meant in terms of people's perceptions of documents as 'the real thing', that those documents were born-digital and were being kept and presented as digital archives of different kinds.

A subsidiary rationale was to explore whether or how being involved in a research project of this kind helped students in the Department of Information Studies at University College London (UCL) to feel more prepared for conducting their own research. This influence can be seen within the research design (e.g. the use of students as both graduate research assistants and interviewees) and it is therefore highlighted here. Data was collected towards the end of the project to ascertain how the students felt that their involvement had impacted on how they viewed research, but as the subsidiary rationale falls outside the scope of InterPARES, the data collection and analysis in connection with this aspect of the research has not been detailed within this report.

1.2 Methodology

Data was collected via interview. Initially the interviewers were asked to interview 'a peer' as this was the first time many of them had undertaken interviewing and it was hoped that allowing them to select an interviewee they already knew and felt comfortable talking to would help in the process of developing their confidence. To this end, two of the graduate research assistants ended up interviewing each other, one interviewed another student on the Archives and Records Management course and the staff member interviewed an experienced archives practitioner. For the subsequent round of interviewing, recruitment was undertaken by a 'pitch' at the Department of Information Studies dissertation boot camp, an annual event held to support students on the department's programmes to prepare for their own research. The pitch was

directed at any student who was not on the Archives and Records Management course as it was felt that it would be interesting to see if there were differences in the perceptions of those being trained in the archives and records management tradition and those who were not. A number of volunteers came forward, but due to timetable clashes it was only possible to interview five further individuals (all of whom were postgraduate students, one on the Library and Information Studies programme, two on the Information Science programme and two on the Digital Humanities programme). All interviewees completed a consent form (see appendix A).

Basic demographic information was recorded via a short questionnaire (see appendix B) in advance of the interview, and this showed that whilst the majority of the interviewees were in the 18-24 age group, there were also individuals in older age groups, with the oldest interviewee being in the 40-49 age group. This participant reported that s/he had first regularly used a computer or other digital device in early adulthood, whilst the others reported that they had done so either at primary school (5-11) or secondary school (12-18).

They were informed via the questionnaire of briefly what the interview would consist of, namely that they would be asked access and comment on four born-digital documents, which were briefly described, and that in particular they would be asked about 'their reactions to these documents in respect of their authenticity, i.e. the degree to which you think you trust them to be what they seem to be and the degree to which they are the real thing'. They were then asked to briefly record any initial thoughts they might have on why it would matter that the documents listed were authentic or not and who it would matter to. This question was designed to provide some insight into how participants perceived authenticity in a more abstract way. During the interview the participants were asked to access each of four documents (detailed below) and to then describe what they thought they were looking at. They were then asked whether or not they thought it was the real thing and why they held that opinion. Finally they were also

asked to reflect back on what they had written in their questionnaire about authenticity and also to consider why they thought these documents were being kept in digital archives. There was a short interview protocol (see appendix C), but it was not strictly followed so long as the above points were covered in some way. The order in which the documents was accessed was reversed in some interviews as a precaution against responses being conditioned by any one particular order. Following the completion of the transcripts, the subsequent data analysis was conducted by the lead researcher alone, as the graduate research assistants were working on their own MA dissertations by this point.

1.3 The documents under consideration

The documents under consideration were initially described to the participants (before the interview) in the following terms:

- Email messages between work colleagues, 2001.
- Metroblogging London Website, 2005.
- Memo to the SCM (Structured Capital Markets) Approval Committee of Barclays Bank seeking approval for Project Faber, 2007.
- Press Notice detailing the response of Lord Nolan to the House of Commons' response to the first report of the Select Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1995.

At the interview, they were given the following instructions in order to access them:

(A) Email messages between work colleagues, 2001.

Go to <http://911digitalarchive.org/>

Click on Collections and then Personal Accounts.

Click on Everyone Check In: Email Conversation and then click to open the text file.

Click download text to get to the following:

<http://911digitalarchive.org/files/original/4a76250060e793738b0a5d0ef38e38f2.txt>

(B) Metroblogging London Website, 2005.

Go to <http://www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/>

Click on the option for London Terrorist Attack 7th July 2005

Go to page 3 of the results

Click on Metroblogging London

Click on the thumbnail image marked 'Archived 19 July 2005' so you get to the following:

[http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20050719120000/http://london.m
etblogs.com/index.html](http://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20050719120000/http://london.m
etblogs.com/index.html)

(C) Memo to the SCM (Structured Capital Markets) Approval Committee of Barclays Bank seeking approval for Project Faber, 2007.

Go to <https://wikileaks.org/index.en.html>

Search for Barclays Bank

Click on Barclays Bank gags Guardian over leaked memos...

Scroll down and click on 'File' for the option BarclaysFaber.pdf so you get to the following:

<https://file.wikileaks.org/file/barclays-tax-avoidance-scm-censored-guardian-2009/BarclaysFaber.pdf>

(D) Press Notice detailing the response of Lord Nolan to the House of Commons' response to the first report of the Select Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1995.

Go to the catalogue of The National Archives

<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

Search for JN/4/94

Click on the first result

Click on add to basket and follow the instructions.

As starts to become apparent from these instructions, the documents under consideration were located in a variety of different 'archives'; two of which were associated with traditional physically located memory institutions, namely The National Archives (D) and the British Library, in the case of the UK Web Archive (B) and two of which were not – the 911 Digital Archive and WikiLeaks (A) and (C). Then again two of the documents were born-digital versions of more traditional physical analogues – (C) and (D), although (C) also included the 'tracked changes' of a word processed document betraying its born digital origins and (D) consisted of both the press notice and a page of metadata detailing its born digital origins - and two were not – (A) being an email conversation and (B) a website. Finally two of the documents were quite dry administrative records (C) and (D) and two were more immediate personal records, generated as a result of traumatic events (A) and (B).

Screenshots of the documents are included below and readers wishing to access them 'properly' can follow the instructions above.

```

----- Original Message -----
From: Lisa Deluca <LDeluca@ebrut.com>
Date: Tue, 11 Sep 2001 14:46:05 -0400
To: Vivek Sud <vsud@ebrut.com>
Subject: Re:

Vivek-

I left them a few hours ago. They made a quick stop. Do you have melissa's
home phone? That is where they were headed.

----- Original Message -----
From: David Chu <dchu@ebrut.com>
Date: Tue, 11 Sep 2001 14:47:58 -0400
To: Vivek Sud <vsud@ebrut.com>
Subject: Fw: 142 atlantic ave

Did you find them?

```

(A) Email messages between work colleagues, 2001.

The screenshot shows the Metroblogging London website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'WELCOME TO METROBLOGGING' and 'LONDON'. Below this is a search bar and a 'RECENT COMMENTS' section. The main content area features a featured article titled 'Sienna holds love summit' with a photo of Sienna Miller. The article text includes 'the world's going to be so ok after all...'. To the right, there are advertisements for 'Methlogs Patron' and 'Neighborhoods 100% Customized Clothing'.

(B) Metroblogging London Website, 2005.

Memo

Barclays Capital

To SCM Approvals Committee

From Adam Moses

Date [] October 2007

Subject Pre-approvals paper – Project Faber



1. SUMMARY

Structured Capital Markets ("SCM") is seeking approval for Project Faber (the "Transaction") with the Luxembourg branch ("LuxBank") of HSH Nordbank AG ("HSH"). LuxBank will be a Luxembourg resident financial institution. The Transaction involves Barclays Investment Bonds (Isle of Man) Limited ("BIB (IoM)") investing through a Luxembourg resident company ("LuxCo") in a portfolio of high grade investments. BIB (IoM) will forward sell preference shares issued by LuxCo (the "B Prefs") to LuxBank.

Economic Benefit

Due to the availability of certain Luxembourg tax benefits, LuxBank is able to provide a gross up under the Forward for any Luxembourg withholding tax suffered on the B Prefs. To the extent that withholding tax arises, BIB (IoM) will be able to take this into account in computing its chargeable profits for CFC purposes with the effect that no apportionment will be required for the relevant accounting periods covering the transaction. LuxBank will derive a benefit of £[2.1]m from the Transaction.

The key financial data is set out below:

	Pre provision (if any)	Post provision (if any)
Proposed size of transaction	£[1,496.1]m, stepping down to £[1,123.8]m after approx. 30 days.	N/A
Estimated revenue	£[9.6]m in 2007, £[11.9]m in 2008, £[7.8]m in 2009.	£[2.9]m in 2007, £[0.7]m in 2008, nil in 2009.
Tax capacity	£[24.1]m in 2007, £[73.4]m in 2008, £[27.1]m in 2009.	£[24.1]m in 2007, £[73.4]m in 2008, £[27.1]m in 2009.
Return on Tax capacity	[23.5]% for transaction	[7.8]% for transaction
WRAs	£[10.5]m	£[10.5]m
Return on WRAs	[278.9]% for transaction	[21.9]% for transaction
PUS	N/A	£[61.1]m in 2007, £[6.2]m in 2008, nil in 2009.

shekha 17/10/07 10:02
Formatted: Indent Left: 0 cm, Hanging 0.75 cm, Numbered + Level: 1 + Numbering Style: 1, 2, 3, ... + Start at: 1 + Alignment: Left + Aligned at: 0 cm + Tab after: 1.27 cm + Indent at: 1.27 cm.

shekha 17/10/07 10:01
Deleted: The ... ("LuxBank") ... [3]

shekha 17/10/07 14:33
Deleted:

shekha 15/10/07 14:17
Inserted:

shekha 10/10/07 19:13
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shekha 15/10/07 14:17
Deleted: on a pre-tax equivalent basis

shekha 15/10/07 13:23
Deleted: 1.337, 892 ... [2]

verdi 15/10/07 9:05
Deleted: 13.5, 17.1, ... £[10.1]m in 200[... [3]

verdi 17/10/07 12:33
Deleted: : Enil in 2009

shekha 15/10/07 18:33
Deleted: 23.6, 67.3, ... £[26.4]m in 200[... [2]

verdi 15/10/07 18:50
Deleted: 23.6, 67.3, ... £[26.4]m in 200[... [3]

verdi 16/10/07 18:51
Deleted: 38.0

verdi 16/10/07 18:53
Deleted: 4.7, ... per annum ... [6]

shekha 15/10/07 11:35
Deleted: Max of ... 33, 7 ... [2]

verdi 15/10/07 11:35
Deleted: Max of ... 33, 7 ... [8]

verdi 15/10/07 11:37
Deleted: 30.5, ... per annum ... (based on max WRA) ... [9]

(C) Memo to the SCM (Structured Capital Markets) Approval Committee of Barclays Bank seeking approval for Project Faber, 2007.

**PRESS NOTICE
COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE**

Chairman:
The Rt. Hon. The Lord Nolan

Date: 19 July 1995

**THE HOUSE OF COMMONS' RESPONSE TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE'S
REPORT ON THE NOLAN REPORT**

COMMENT BY LORD NOLAN

As I have already said, I welcome the speed and the depth of consideration that the House has given to our report. It was clear to the Committee that the best way to allay public anxiety was prompt and firm action.

I continue to believe that individual proposals should be considered in the round, and therefore I do not wish to comment on any part of the House's deliberations.

We made it clear that aspects of the position on consultancies needed further consideration by Parliament, and obviously it would be very satisfactory if this issue was resolved by the autumn.

Issued by:

**The Committee on Standards in Public Life
Horse Guards Road
London
SW1P 3AL**

Further information from:

**Peter Rose
Press Secretary to Committee
Tel: 0171 270 6345 or 01399 1133 and ask for pager no 747 035
Home Tel: 01273 881150**

(D) Press Notice detailing the response of Lord Nolan to the House of Commons' response to the first report of the Select Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1995.

(The National Archives, JN/4/94)

Chapter Two - Data Analysis

2.1 The real thing (TRT) coding framework

Transcriptions from the interviews were coded against a framework (see appendix D) adapted from the following article:

K.F. Latham (2015) 'What is 'the real thing' in the museum? An interpretative phenomenological study', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 30:1, 2-20, DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2015.1008393

Latham's study was interested in understanding how museum visitors understood their experience of the real thing and was based on interviews with 21 visitors from five museums who were asked to walk through their visit to an exhibit and consider questions such as '*What does 'the real thing' mean to you?*' and '*What if museums went completely online?*' (original italics).¹ The framework used Latham's main finding of 'four qualitatively different ways of understanding 'TRT' in the museum', making these different ways of; Self, Relation, Presence and Surround, the main codes against which analysis was conducted. Within each of these main codes, sub-codes were created for the various ideas identified by Latham, resulting in 25 codes in total.

The decision to use this framework was taken on the grounds that it offered the potential to generate an understanding of perceptions of born digital authenticity in a context different from that with which the coder was familiar. It was hoped that this would make it more difficult for her to slip into her familiar ways of thinking and allow for novel insight to emerge, free, or at least freer, from the frameworks of thought already developed in the archives and records management discipline. The experience of the interviews had already shown that it was difficult to escape these frameworks

¹ K.F. Latham (2015) What is 'the real thing' in the museum? An interpretative phenomenological study,

and that, despite attempts to remain open in the idea of ‘the real thing’, interviewers and interviewees alike often returned to narrow senses of authenticity as, for example, their belief or otherwise in the accuracy of the content of the document. Given the exploratory nature of this study, this was felt to be problematic, since the aim was more to open things out rather than close them down.

The other reason for the decision to use the real thing framework was that it would allow for an understanding of perceptions of *born digital* authenticity to be generated in the context of an understanding which had previously been developed in a *physical* environment. It was hoped that in this way insights might be gleaned around the difference between digital and physical things, rather than just that between things that were felt to be authentic and those that were not.

To some extent these hopes were realized. Unsurprisingly perhaps, the real thing framework did not always fit well with the data being analysed, but the process of trying to make it fit was instructive in itself. Questions were raised about ‘the cost’ involved in squeezing things into certain categories and insights were generated. It is impossible to know if these insights would have been radically different if another framework had been employed, but the coder certainly felt that she was forced to think differently in applying a framework developed by another individual in different circumstances.

What follows then is a written account of the results of the coding process, which remains reasonably stream of conscious in an attempt to capture as accurately as possible the initial thinking about and with the data. Attempts to make sense of this initial thinking are recorded subsequently and separately in chapter three.

2.2 Self

Latham defines self in the following way;

The experience is related to one's own personal memories, knowledge, interests, imagination and 'new' learning. It is about one's own identity, understandings, and ways of figuring things out for one's self.²

In the case of this data however, in coding to 'self' the focus came to rest on the sort of things the participants said of themselves. This turned out to be mostly statements about what they did and did not know and what they would or would not expect, e.g.

I sort of would have expected it to have more branding on (9)

I don't know who and where these emails come from (8)

after a terrorist attack **I would expect that kind of an outcome** from the public (6)

it's in the Web Archive, the way back archive, which um **I know** takes kind of screen shots of different websites to preserve them (2)

Knowing and expecting were the most commonly used actions participants ascribed to themselves, but occasionally they also spoke of remembering and imagining, e.g.

Yeah **I remember** getting-, going home from school and being like 'oh.' Ok so maybe it was early in the morning. (1)

I imagine that um certainly mobile phone communications were difficult um on that particular day (3)

Ultimately all these ascriptions to the self, seemed to be concerned with making the judgement they were being asked to make (as to whether or not the document in question was the real thing). Different forms of knowledge including memory and

² Latham, 'What is the real thing', p6.

imagination were appealed to in the formation of these judgements, which were also governed to some extent by existing expectations. Expectations were not always claimed as the individual's own however, but were often generalized as commonly held beyond the participant alone e.g.

it looks like **you would expect** email conversations to look (9)

with all of the right kind of information that **you would expect** on something like a press notice (2)

it's different from what **you would expect** it to look like (1)

Some participants considered how their background might influence their judgements, e.g.

I'm just wondering if it's, if the source is such a big deal because I'm doing a library course (9)

I don't know if that's just because I am an archivist and I like to look at the context all the time (3)

But generally, coding to the category of 'self' tended to highlight the terms in which individuals made, or formed their judgements and these terms were those of what they knew or did not know, what they imagined or remembered and what they would expect (either individually or more generally).

Of the terms in which individuals made or formed their judgements, the most important seemed to be knowing. Not knowing enough was definitely seen as problematic, e.g.

I don't know how trustworthy blogs can be (9)

I don't know *that* much about it, it's something that happened when I was sort of like you know in school so you don't pay attention (1)

Consequently, there were frequent references to needing to know or find out more, e.g.

if I could find some information about the authors I think that would be more reliable (8)

I think you'd have to **research more** in order to see if it's authentic (7)

I don't know, **I'd like to check out** if the people are who they say they are, like the chairman at the time (2)

Within the TRT framework, this question of not knowing found a home in the 'surround' dimension.

2.3 Surround

Latham defines 'surround' as;

gestalt that the real could only be experienced as a part of a larger scenario or situation, consisting of many parts that come together to create a whole that becomes the real.³

In this respect he also identifies two opposing ways of experiencing the real through surround; more and less. More involved 'more supportive features in the environment' with those of this bent wanting 'more support surrounding them in order to understand something as real'.⁴ In attempting to squeeze the data into these categories, there was plenty of more, but hardly any less. Participants always wanted more information or knowledge to support them in their judgement, never less.

more details – when it was issued and information about who conducted it, the secretary of the Committee (7)

³ Latham, 'What is the real thing', p13.

⁴ Latham, 'What is the real thing', p13, p14.

this one the links about the authors' doesn't work, but if it worked yes I could have **more information** to evaluate (8)

Coding to 'surround' in this way, highlighted the fact that, of the 'actual environmental factors' suggested by Latham – namely 'lighting, amount of information, spatial features, place, time, presentation style, number of people present, etc.' – only amount of information was mentioned by the participants in this case.⁵ This is perhaps unsurprising, since the actual environment in which the participants encountered these documents was consistent in all cases – on a computer in an office with a couple of people in it. Then again, the way in which they encountered them was also fairly standard, with participants being asked to follow a series of instructions to get to each document. The only difference in the way in which the documents were encountered that was mentioned by one of the participants was the different procedure for one of the documents (held at The National Archives) that could not just be navigated to, through the web, but instead had to be ordered and downloaded, e.g.

The way I downloaded it, is quite complicated [Laughs] but the process is, is clear... add to the basket, just how I do my shopping and well I think it's real, maybe. (5)

That the way in which the documents were encountered was not mentioned very much did not mean however that there was no sense of a place/environment where they were being encountered, e.g.

it was **on** Wikileaks (9)

on that platform of The National Archives (6)

I think the **location of these things** is significant (3)

I guess it's interesting that it's **on** the WikiLeaks page (2)

⁵ Latham, 'What is the real thing', p13.

it's being **hosted** by the British Library through the UK Web Archive (1)

These sorts of quotes were found a place within TRT framework, under the 'presence' theme.

2.4 Presence

Latham defines 'presence' as 'the actual presence of a physical thing that is in the space with the experiencer' and also says that 'presence involves a thereness of the thing'.⁶ Given that the 'things' with which we were dealing were digital objects, it was unclear how the data might map onto a notion of 'presence'. The participants did not seem to indicate that they felt that they were in the same space with these things but, as can be seen from the above, they did indicate that they felt the documents were somewhere.

Another aspect of presence that Latham identified, related to truth and trust;

Trust is associated with people's trust in the institution of the museum (specific and in general), that people trust in the museum to have something real.⁷

This came through strongly in the data, although possibly in a more specific than general way, as it was the particular institution that was mentioned and the sites did not all represent the same general category of institution, e.g.

The fact that it is archived by the British Library, it makes it more valid and official to me. (8)

I wouldn't have thought The National Archive would allow its name to be sullied by having like inauthentic documents on its website (9)

⁶ Latham, 'What is the real thing', p10.

⁷ Latham, 'What is the real thing', p13.

I guess it's interesting that it's on the WikiLeaks page because they are known for digging up the truth, so it makes me sort of think it's authentic because it's a file that they have brought up to say this thing has been going on and everybody needs to know. (2)

We will return to this question of the institution when we consider the coding to the 'relation' theme, but for now we will remain on that of presence and 'thereness'. As has been stated above this was an interesting theme to code to, given that all the objects in question were digital ones. In Latham's analysis 'thereness' also carried with it the idea that the objects in question were not just 'present' now, but had also been 'present' in another time and place and that;

this actual thing that was once in the space with another person at another time holds something different than anything that has not followed the same path.⁸

Coding to this theme, therefore started to bring the question of place and time to the fore. The documents were most often seen as being located 'now' on a particular website (see above) but where they had been located in the past was less commonly discussed or referenced. In one case, that of the document from The National Archives which includes metadata of, for example, the Directory name of the file, one participant did mention that;

OK and there's another piece of information about **where it originated from** I think yes I am assuming this is somebody's computer, this is where the press notice originates (9)

There is a sense here that this press notice had at one time been located on 'somebody's computer' since that was its place of origin. Other than that, references to past place were occasionally made with regards to the email string following the 9/11 attacks, e.g.

⁸ Latham, 'What is the real thing', p10.

I didn't find this, that **it was in New York** (8)

Yes I noticed that it's people checking with each other, yes, but I ignored **this detail of the time and the place.** (8)

Here the location is seen as New York, but it is unclear whether the email string is being seen as having once had a physical location in New York, or whether New York is being known as the location of 9/11 and hence the trigger for making sense of what this string of emails is about.

The sense that people had of a past existence for the documents seemed therefore to be less about where they had been, and more about when they had been. Dates and times were frequently mentioned, e.g.

I'm looking at the date first, to see **when this document was conducted** (7)

everything has got an author and **a time stamp from when it was posted, umm and the dates they were posted** (2)

That the documents could be located at a particular point in time seemed to be important. For example, in making judgements of authenticity, it was supportive if the timing of the document fitted with the participants' own sense of timing, e.g.

I can see the time of after the hit of the crashes of the aeroplanes, it indicates some type of authenticity, but I wouldn't say so for sure. (7)

Oh I can't figure out the timings. [...] Time is jumping around everywhere now. [...] I'm not sure if this actually started off as a check in to see that everyone was okay, erm because it starts off early in the morning like at 9am and obviously it didn't-, it happened at midday, yeah. Erm, or did it happen earl-, I'm not sure what time it was? It was like lunch time for us. But obviously New York's a different... (1)

I think I'm looking at a series of emails from 11th September 2001; they're in the afternoon so that's either the date the time they've come through or these are emails that were sent in a GMT time zone. (4)

I cannot remember the sequence of you know the timings of events and things but clearly some people are sort of just going home and there is at least one person saying um can we get back in the building yet so I suppose its plausible that some of these people may have been killed later in the day? (3)

It also seemed to be supportive in more general terms, e.g.

it has days and times so that's quite reliable (8)

With regards to time, many of the documents did convey (primarily through their form) a sense of progression, and this was commented on, e.g.

It does appear that the latest email is at the start, going back chronologically. (4)

They spent a lot of time on this, because here is the 10th of October and 17th October. (5) [In relation to the time stamps on the edits to the Barclays memo]

I think I'm led by the chronology of it and the dates and times in particular; it gives it a sense of being accurate, unfolding in the moment of individual contributions (4)

Sometimes, this progression, seemed supportive of the 'realness' of the document, as with the last quote, but sometimes it was problematic. The main example of this was in relation to the document from The National Archives. Here the press notice itself was dated 19 July 1995, but the metadata included at the end had fields for both 'creation date' and 'last printed on' which were both completed with the value '02/07/98 11:32'. This discrepancy was often noted and commented upon;

I think it's odd that **it's 1998 that it was last printed**, that might have significance (9)

It says creation date is this file [I. yes] it seems not to match (8)

looking now at some of the information about the creation dates, which is obviously a few years after the document was dated 1995 creation dates 2nd July 1998 which could be the digitalisation date, maybe, but erm suggests that's not it's "born" digital date as it were. Do you think it's a "born" digital document. I think it's been created in ... I'm going by the creation date 1988 and that it's possibly a digitised document from 1995 if it's an authentic document. (4)

Considering this coding, the thought started to emerge that there was a difference between time unfolding within the document and time unfolding around it. Time unfolding within the document led to an unfolding narrative, the end of which often remained unknown?

I suppose its plausible that some of these people may have been killed later in the day? (3)

Not knowing the ending was sometimes a concern in that it did not allow for the full picture, e.g.

With the Barclays SEM committee memo, this appears to, at first glance, to have a detailed editorial history, which I think is important to have that, but I've no way of knowing if that's the full picture, or there are other version which aren't represented here. (4)

It's very clearly a draft, um, there are other documents on the Wikileaks page and I mean it's possible it's, even if it's genuine, it's possible that it didn't get further, I mean that it wasn't sent, it didn't get, the Committee threw it out um [pause] it's impossible to tell (4)

When time unfolded around the document however, the ending was always known, with its appearance 'now' on a screen in front of you. What became a concern instead then, was the gap between then (when the document first came into existence) and now. In Latham's analysis of thereness, he also talks of 'conflating the then and now'. Conflating then and now can help bring then to now, bringing events to life, e.g.

the human side of it, I mean yes it adds to it because I can imagine what it would be like you know you're trying to find out where all of your colleagues (9)

But it does so only in the imagination, outside physical things. Shifting your attention back to the object that triggers this reaction the conflation only highlights the separation, the gap formed between the thing that both was and is, then and now. Acknowledging the gap takes us onto the last of Latham's themes, that of relation.

Relation

For Latham, relation is;

about connecting to other beings (living things), events, the past, and ways of life, but in less personal aspects than in the Self theme. Instead these conceptions are more about understanding what it means to live in a time or be at an event in history This way of experiencing TRT can be strictly about understanding in an instrumental way, such as gathering historic information, but it can also be an empathic understanding.⁹

This sense can be found at the end of the previous section, and it was also found at other points, particularly perhaps in response to questions as to why the documents were being kept, e.g.

⁹ Latham, 'What is the real thing', p8.

it's a historical artefact, isn't it, of the event, it's you know and I suppose especially if, if you're thinking about people in the future what they might want to know about it (9)

I think it's a kind of important record about that special period so that is it would be worth being kept (8)

the time is very close, it seems very quick response and I think it's, they are, they work in the same company, maybe it's in the building that was destroyed so **I can feel that, the tense and people's anxiety** (8)

When coding to this theme with the data in this case however, where attention started to be paid was on the ways in which the participants conjured up others in relation to the documents, e.g.

They are all very attentive to the details, such as formatting or something and delete and other things here. (5)

people posted some photos (8)

this really is what **they** are saying. And... mmm, the headings of the emails here: who sent it, when did **they** send it, time, to whom, subjects. (7)

Where these others were unknown or anonymous, they were sometimes assumed to be similar to the participants, e.g.

They are just uh, some, **some people are just like us, everyone** can post anything online in their post (5)

it is created by someone like you or me and that something can be shown on the material but it doesn't mean it's very objective it doesn't mean it completely records the truth (8)

This imagining of others, whether or not they were explicitly said to be like 'us', opened out questions of agenda and objectivity versus subjectivity, e.g.

It is personal opinion of **certain people** who, sometimes in certain occasions, might over-react and might come up with stuff to be interesting on a blog spot (7)

although I guess not necessarily authentic if **people** are sort of presenting a different online persona to what they think in real life (2)

The roles these imagined people were imagined into varied, but were most often those of creators, rather than users as such. In fact the only times those who might have previously used these documents came into view, were as follows;

I am prepared to believe that this is er a reasonably real representation of um a blog as it appeared in 2005 on a pc screen. It might have looked different to somebody else (3)

Not really sure how you'd receive this. Or like what the actual-, if you received this as a record would you have got it as like an email or is it on the website (1)

dated formatting on the right hand side by a number of **different users, the users** being colour coded users for their individual input. (5)

Thus we have an implication that someone else might have viewed the metroblogging site before, another that someone will have received one of the documents and finally a characterization of the editors of the Barclays memo as users rather than co-creators. The question of co-creation or multiple authorship was commented on, as seemingly it was more difficult to think of a single agenda behind the document, e.g.

The metroblogging is more, I think it's-, *I think* it doesn't belong to **anyone**, the website. Maybe I'm wrong but that's the feeling I get. So **no one's steering** it in any direction (6)

Moreover, multiple authorship was also seen as being harder to fake, e.g.

like there's a lot of posts and the effort again to create a fake one with various different creators with their own styles and to find pictures and I just think it would be a bit much (9)

people are saying, they're very kind of, I don't know it would be very hard for someone, to not be real, because of there are so many different voices and styles to the way they are writing (2)

Not knowing enough about the imagined creators was seen as a problem in terms of judging whether or not a document was the real thing, e.g.

I can't really know **who it is who's putting it together** especially as I can't find an about section or something that actually gives me some idea of who these um people oh I can't find anything that sort of tells me who these people are who have been making these entries (3)

In some cases, roles did not have to be assigned to imagined others, as who filled that role was known, particularly perhaps in the case of the current host or perhaps owner or presenter of the document. We have seen under presence how the participants did view these documents as being on or hosted by particular sites, which were then associated with institutions/agents that they felt were trustworthy or not, e.g.

I mean having been to The National Archives I think **they've** probably got enough, they haven't got enough time on their hands to have like some major conspiracy going on but you know (9)

I think the location of these things is significant um in all cases actually um because **they** all have some kind of reputation sort of reputational um authority maybe um and perhaps ironically the one that I would trust least on those grounds would be WikiLeaks because they have a clear agenda for um, there is more, it seems to me there is more of an incentive for fraud in WikiLeaks than there is um on any of those other, the other sites that we've looked at (3)

I guess it's interesting that it's on the WikiLeaks page because **they** are known for digging up the truth, so it makes me sort of think it's authentic because it's a

file that they have brought up to say this thing has been going on and everybody needs to know. (2)

Finally some other roles into which people were imagined, included that of faker, or manipulator;

I don't know why **people** would do some fake things in this particular thing because I think it's a serious topic. (6)

I don't see a reason for **anyone** to meddle with that (6)

And very rarely perhaps, intermediary between creator and current host/owner, e.g.

obviously this has been edited because it's here so **someone** took it out of some-, some organisation's server edited it to portray-, to convey this message of how people were trying to find each other in the chaos (6)

it's usually from a source from within the company. So, how else would someone have got this document while it was in process? It must be legitimate to an extent because it's obviously not a finished item. Erm and you can't just take things like that I suppose [...] you'd hope from like a bank like Barclays. (1)

Chapter Three – Conclusions and reflections

3.1 Examination of results

As a result of choosing the TRT coding framework of self, surround, presence and relation, the focus of attention came to rest on the following areas;

- 1 The terms in which people expressed themselves when explaining their judgements on the degree to which the documents were the real thing or not
- 2 The sense in which these documents seemed not to be seen as sharing an environment with the participants, but nonetheless had presence somewhere
- 3 The nature of the presence of these documents, more somewhere than here and in relation to time
- 4 The people imagined or known who were discussed in relation to the individual documents and the roles they were assigned.

It is these areas which will now be considered in more detail. The first and last will be considered together and then the second and third.

3.2 Judgements of authenticity

The first and last are taken together as they seem to be the most relevant to the idea of authenticity as it is broadly considered in InterPARES as;

The trustworthiness of a record as a record; i.e., the quality of a record that is what it purports to be and that is free from tampering or corruption.¹⁰

We have seen how, in reaching a judgement on authenticity, individuals tend to express themselves in terms of what they know, imagine, remember and expect. Then again, a second pass over the data looking at this focus in particular, also revealed instances of individuals talking in terms of what they felt and were inclined to believe as well, e.g.

¹⁰ InterPARES Terminology Database

because I recognise something inside of the content that make me **feel** doubt (8)

It **feels** authentic. (6)

I would say it's authentic or it should be because **I'm inclined to believe** metadata (2)

This second pass also considered the question of what it was 'extra' that people wanted to know in order to support a judgment that the document was authentic or the real thing, given that another initial finding was that they always wanted to know more. Sometimes all they wanted was an explanation of something that was bothering them, as witness this exchange between one participant and one interviewer, e.g.

I sort of would expect I don't know like the portcullis symbol and that, but it is 1995 so I don't know how things have changed [...]

Interviewer: And I guess also if it was printed out, cos it looks like it's word processed then printed out, the portcullis might have been on the headed notepaper that you printed it on to

Oh that's true, yes

But often, they spoke of what 'more' they wanted to know in terms that related to other people, e.g. they wanted to know;

if the people are who they say they are, like the chairman at the time (2)

who these people are and what their intention or intended audience were for this particular blog (3)

who's Roger Maxwell (9) [listed in the metadata to The National Archives document as the Author]

There was a definite sense of others behind these documents and their (often imagined) motives and (where known) reputations were important variables in judgements of authenticity. In this regard a sense of multiple others in relation to a document (such as the metroblogging site with many contributors) was harder to associate with any one particular agenda.

Another finding, that it would be interesting to investigate further, is the way in which, in the context of these sorts of discussions, the roles in which these others were most often seen or placed were those of creation or currently hosting/holding. Those who had used these documents and their prior uses were much less evident, as were additional intermediaries between the document as it was first created and its current existence on a particular/in the hands of a particular organisation's website. Does less evident necessarily correspond to less evidential with regards to the document's perceived authenticity? And if so, how and why and should this be the case?

The ways in which the participants populated or not a gap between existence then and existence now and postulated or not a journey of some kind from then to now became another focus, particularly perhaps because it was at this point that overlap with other senses of 'the real thing' started to appear. There was a sense in which distance was seen as making things less real, this time perhaps in the sense of in the moment. For example, in response to the question 'And of the four [documents] then, [...] which one would you say is the most real or feels the most real, however you want to interpret what I've just asked', Interviewee nine responded;

um because the email exchange and the blog because they're not, they're not highly formatted, they haven't been, no one's gone through like ten drafts of it to produce it, it feels more close to the, to what somebody actually thinks and what someone might actually say if you just stopped them in the street (9)

And then again, interviewee 4, in the context of the metroblogging site, spoke of;

the authenticity of reaction, the immediacy of the reactions, perhaps of the individuals involved in making these comments (4)

And yet, as interviewee 6 pointed out, distance was also an issue in terms of things being 'real' more in the InterPARES sense of authenticity, e.g.

when I was looking for that page it was archives, so it's like another layer between me and the information so there is another step there was someone involved in the process which can add some uncertainty (6)

3.3 Digital presence

The overlap with digital presence comes through most clearly then with the conflating then and now theme identified by Latham. Or rather perhaps in the balance between this theme, in bringing things in the past to life, and that of how

this actual thing that was once in the space with another person at another time holds something different than anything that has not followed the same path.¹¹

In this data, and perhaps unsurprisingly given the born digital nature of the material, the idea of space in the sense of physical location became more mute. There was not much of a sense of these documents being in the same space as either the participants or anyone else, rather they were located on somebody's computer or on this or that website. They were therefore seen as being more indirectly with other people, associated with them temporally – at particular times.

A second pass over the data in terms, more explicitly, of presence threw up this particular exchange between an interviewer and interviewee 1, which raised questions about the temporality of born digital documents and a sense of digital presence as 'the real thing' in terms of being able to interact with it now;

¹¹ Latham, 'What is the real thing', p10.

I think websites are a confusing thing because I just think 'yeah of course it's real,' because look I'm on it now and I can click on the links and click on the pictures and stuff. Umm.

Interviewer: Okay and does that affect whether you think it's authentic or not?

Erm, no it-, it all looks pretty real and authentic you know lots of different bits and pieces. [...] you know it's interesting because this is the first one where it's got-, I don't know what would happen if I clicked on the comments or something like that or like the poster user name.

Interviewer: Yep. You could try doing that.

Let's see what happens. Does this take me nowhere? Oh, yeah so it's-, it's interesting because it's like I can actually use it this is the first born-digital item that it's not just made redundant by the fact that it was captured and kept in an archive.

Again though, it is worth noting that in many cases a sense of presence over/in time, was not matched by a sense of presence through time. And where the latter was mentioned it was often only as a response of the prompt given by the mismatching dates between the date of the press notice and the date in the metadata within the document from The National Archives, e.g.

The metadata is just about when it was made. This says 1998 but it was in 1995 so does that mean it's been digitised? (1)

3.4 Final reflections

This project sought to explore perceptions of born digital authenticity in relation to documents that were born-digital and being kept and presented in and as digital archives of different kinds. Data in the form of interview transcriptions was coded using a framework adapted and adopted from a study into individuals' experience of the real thing in the context of physical museum exhibits. This analysis (along dimensions of self,

surround, presence and relation) led, in regards to self and relation, to a focus on judgements of authenticity, and, in regards to presence and surround, to a focus on the question of digital presence. These foci raise a question of whether and how the way in which a document is perceived to be a thing (to have a presence) might impact on and is implicated in any judgement as to its authenticity.

In the overlap between the two foci outlined above, an additional focus on the conflation of then and now emerged; both in the way in which the participants populated (or not) a gap or journey between a document's existence then and existence now, and in the temporal aspect of presence in the moment versus that of over or through time. This focus remained a little fuzzier, but is of note, partly because the born digital nature of the documents seemed to make it even fuzzier, suggesting perhaps that it will become more difficult to conceive of things travelling from then until now which might impact on our conceptions of things as 'the real thing'.

These conclusions are still quite vague, but this is felt to be acceptable in the context of exploratory research. The next step will be to take the foci developed here and apply them to the existing literature. This has not yet been done, because the project has sought to give space to the individual perspective under investigation and to open things out rather than to close them down or integrate them. Nonetheless it is hoped that the sensitivities emerging from this in-depth consideration or perceptions of born digital authenticity will allow existing thinking around the concept to be considered from a slightly different, but grounded, perspective.

Appendix A – Information Sheet and consent form

User perceptions of born digital authenticity

This sheet provides information about the above study and invites you to participate in it. It provides answers to some of the questions you might have, but if you have further questions, please contact me. My contact details are as follows;

Jenny Bunn, Lecturer, Department of Information Studies, University College London, Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT.

Email: j.bunn@ucl.ac.uk

Telephone: 020 7679 2481

What exactly is the study about?

Documents are increasingly being born-digital and, in the future, our history will be constructed on the basis of material which has never taken on a physical existence. This research seeks to explore what this change might mean for the way in which individuals experience, understand and judge such material to be authentic and ‘the real thing’.

What does participation involve?

If you decide to get involved, we will arrange a time to meet for an interview. You will also be asked to complete a short questionnaire (15-20 minutes), which will form a starting point for our conversation. At the interview (which should take about 1-1.5 hours), you will be asked to look at and consider four different documents. The interview will be recorded and transcribed and this transcription will be forwarded to you (along with a copy of the recording if you wish to have a copy). You will be asked to make any changes or additions to the transcription that you wish. The results of the study will be summarised in a final report, and may also be disseminated in journal articles and presentations. Copies of all of these end products will be provided to you, should you so wish.

Will my anonymity be maintained?

The conclusions to be drawn from this study will not require that any individual participant be referred to by name, only by a broad description, e.g. ‘Interviewee A’. This project is registered with the UCL Data Protection Officer and data will be collected and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

If I am interested, what do I do next?

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. It will take up a limited amount of your time, but it will also offer you the opportunity to learn about the research process and reflect on your attitudes to born digital material. If you would like to be involved, please contact me (details above) and complete the attached consent form.

User perceptions of born digital authenticity

I have read and understood the information contained in the Information Sheet and would like to participate in this study.

In relation to my participation in this study, I note that the researcher has outlined her undertaking to me in the Information Sheet and offered me a number of options for shaping my own contribution. In this regard I would like to register the following conditions to my participation (delete as appropriate):

- I would/would not like to receive a copy of the interview recording.
- I do/do not wish to receive copies of all public presentations of this work.
- I would/would not be willing for access to any anonymised questionnaires and transcriptions pertaining to my participation to be widened after the completion of the study for the benefit of future researchers. N.B. The intention is that, where permission is granted, the original data collected during this project will be preserved in a recognised data repository, e.g. the UCL institutional repository.

- I wish to register the following additional conditions (complete box as required)

Signed:

Date:

The position set out in this document can be renegotiated during the course of your participation. Please keep a copy of it for your records and contact me if you wish to revisit it during the research process.

Jenny Bunn, Lecturer, Department of Information Studies, University College London,
Gower Street, London, WC1E 6BT.

Email: j.bunn@ucl.ac.uk

Telephone: 020 7679 2481

Appendix B – Pre-interview Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Although this is an anonymous study, we would still like to know a few things about you to help us contextualise our results. Please could you answer the following questions and bring this form with you to the interview. Thank you.

1. What age are you?

18-24 25-29 30-39 40-49 50+

2. At what life stage did you first regularly use a computer/tablet/other digital device?

Infancy (0-4) Primary school (5-11) Secondary school (12-18)

Early adulthood (18-24) Aged 25 or over

3. Which programme are you on?

During your interview, you will be asked to access and comment on four born-digital ‘documents’, which are briefly described below:

- Press Notice detailing the response of Lord Nolan to the House of Commons’ response to the first report of the Select Committee on Standards in Public Life, 1995.
- Email messages between work colleagues, 2001.
- Metroblogging London Website, 2005.
- Memo to the SCM (Structured Capital Markets) Approval Committee of Barclays Bank seeking approval for Project Faber, 2007.

In particular you will be asked about your reactions to these documents in respect of their authenticity, i.e. the degree to which you think you trust them to be what they seem to be and the degree to which they are the real thing.

4. Can you think of any reasons why it would matter that the above listed documents were or were not

(Continue overleaf if necessary)

authentic, and whom it would matter to?

Appendix C – Interview Schedule

Review questionnaire and consent form.

Provide sheet with details of documents.

Get the participant to get to each document in turn. Help them if they get stuck.

Ask the participant to review the document and tell you;

- 1) What they can see/What it is they are looking at
- 2) Whether they think it is the real thing or not? Is it the real thing? Is it authentic
- 3) What has influenced their answer to 2)

After all the documents have been looked at, ask them to revisit the questionnaire question.

- 1) Can you think of any reasons why it should matter if these documents are authentic or not and to whom it would matter?

Finally, point out that all these documents have been deemed important enough to be put in an archive and that someone is putting energy into keeping them up there, so

- 1) Do they think the things they have looked at are worth keeping in an archive or not? Why?

Appendix D – ‘The Real Thing’ coding framework

Adapted from K.F. Latham (2015) What is ‘the real thing’ in the museum? An interpretative phenomenological study, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 30:1, 2-20, DOI: 10.1080/09647775.2015.1008393

Self: TRT is experienced through aspects of myself

Personal knowledge/memories

Inspiration

Confirmation of one’s identity

Imagining of oneself

Learning something new

Relation: TRT is experienced by connecting me to other people (beings), events, times and things

Learning about history

Empathetic understanding of what it must have been like

A part of something bigger

Associations with those who used it

Associations with those who made it

Associations with those who set it up

Presence: TRT is an actual physical thing that was there and is right here in front of me now

Thereness

Conflation/Separation

Materiality and Uniqueness

Agency

Energy/aura

Truth and trust

Surround: TRT is experienced in the way it is presented to me and by what surrounds me (and it)

Environmental factors

More support

Less support

Museality