Different Views on Digital Preservation

Portico Participants Meeting
2009 ALA Annual Conference
Sayeed Choudhury (sayeed@jhu.edu)
Johns Hopkins University

A Summary View

- Digital preservation is really difficult

- Digital preservation is really important

- Importance >> Difficulty

Why is it difficult?

- Bit-level preservation with today's rendering technology is manageable

- Full-fledged preservation is still a largely unsolved problem

- The machine readability, scale, diversity, complexity, and interconnectedness of data make it difficult—especially when we consider the unforeseen

Why is it important?

- Think of the memory part of memory institutions

- "If I have seen farther than others, it is because I have stood on the shoulders of giants." – Sir Isaac Newton

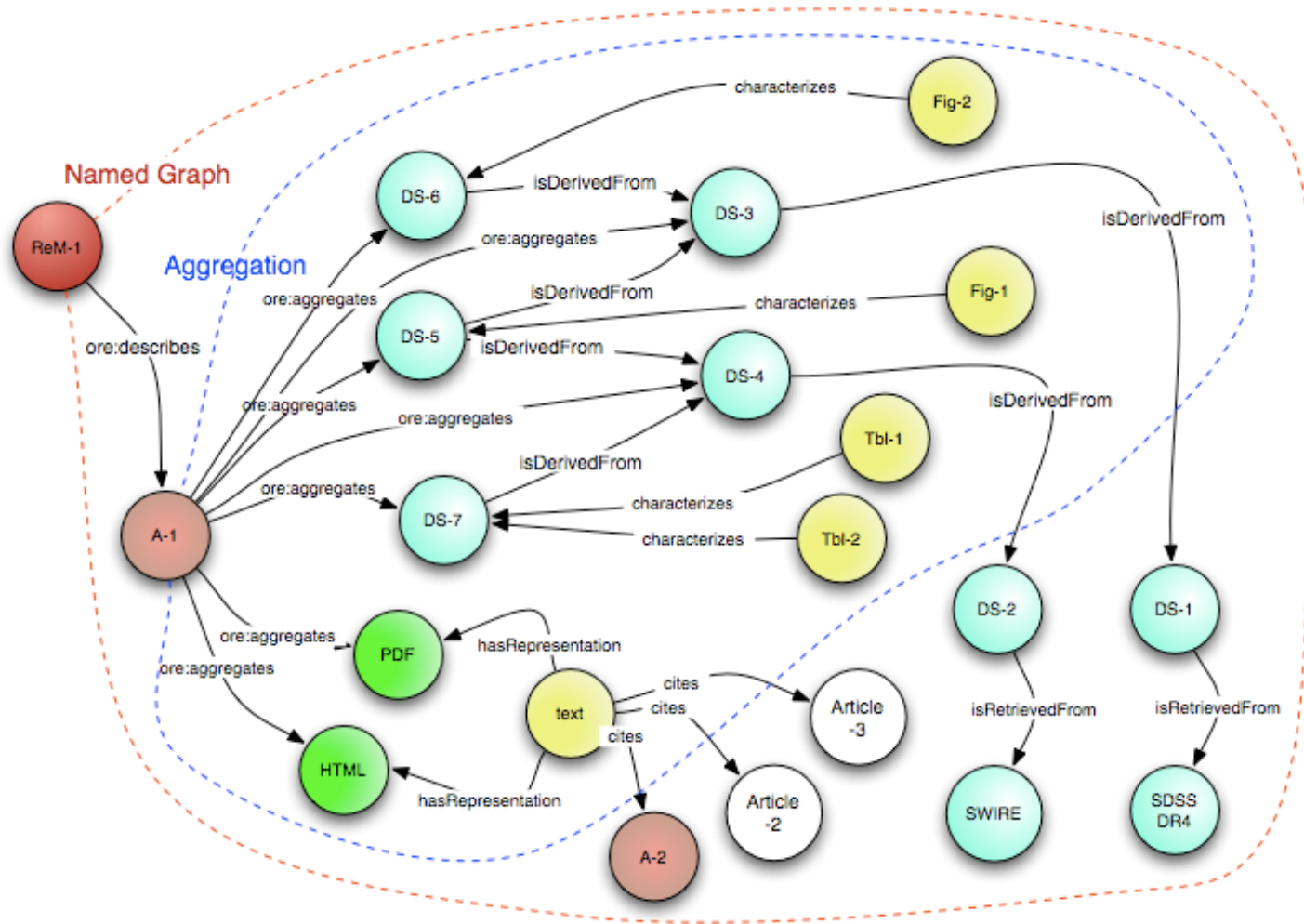- It's what we are being asked to do and there is not much competition--at least not yet

A Philosophical View

- We should preserve our knowledge the way the Earth preserves its rivers

- Rivers start within deep, cold "storage" in the mountains and eventually end up in warmer environments of the oceans

- Each stage of the journey is different and important—especially toward supporting diverse ecosystems

Our Stages

- Global-scale infrastructure such as Portico or HathiTrust that require extensive systems and HVAC at a multi-institutional scale

- Local-scale infrastructure such as institutional repositories that address unique collections

- Individual-scale infrastructure such as my iPhone that reflect personal preferences or goals

A Strategic View

What Can We Do?

- Choose partners to build global-scale infrastructure or support others' efforts

- Use the "cloud" but do so judiciously

- Focus on unique content including data

- Consider the balance between access and preservation, especially as it relates to budgets

Urgent View

Don't assume it's somebody else's problem It's our problem