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Section 7 Response

The readings for this week highlighted several pitfalls that can accompany digital representations of history and archaeological finds. Although the solutions in these articles don’t necessarily reference work on a site like ours at the JBH, there are definitely theories that we can apply to our work at the JBH.

I think that an interesting concept is virtual heritage. Virtual heritage is a combination of virtual reality and cultural heritage and is the “use of digital technologies to record, model, visualize and communicate cultural and natural heritage[[1]](#footnote-1).” While multimedia representations are exciting and innovative, there are certain aspects we should be striving to include in our presentations. “The challenges presented by virtual heritage involve finding a way to accurately visually reconstruct data, to present and enhance the virtual involvement with elements that incorporate knowledge providing and spectacle, and to provide the ability to gain insights by actively engaging in and even modifying the experience[[2]](#footnote-2).” To sum up Roussou, when thinking of our representations at the JBH we have to accurately present our data and give our viewers an engaging experience. As Roussou also said, there needs to be an “exploration of the dialogical relationship between representation, experience design, and interaction[[3]](#footnote-3).”

When possible, we should try and make our presentations interactive because “an exhibition of learning environment is considered more effective if it is interactive[[4]](#footnote-4).” Although we should aim for an interactive experience, we also need to be careful of not crossing the border between education and entertainment. According to Roussou, a successful entertainment experience has the rights levels of “appealing to a visitor’s levels of interest, empathy, and imagination[[5]](#footnote-5).” I think that these are all qualities that an education exhibit should also possess, while remembering that the main focus is education rather than entertainment.

Hannah Lewi focused on digital representations used in institutions. According to her, museums are no longer just places for “effecting sensationalism and wonderment of the strange and curious[[6]](#footnote-6).” Museums have come to “represent a new kind of visual and spatial pedagogical experience in which narratives of normative culture, history and nature were rendered visible and vivid.” With the new role that museums can play, people worry that artifacts can become merely “stencils off the real[[7]](#footnote-7).” So, while we are able to use media in our representations, we have to remember to provide them with a realistic picture that also gives a sense of the historical importance of what they are viewing.

Many of the multimedia type final projects that we are working on are our means of presenting our finds in digital contexts. We’re able to use pictures, videos, podcasts and websites to showcase our information. Lewi also warns that when designing a multimedia presentation, one must make sure that there is a careful balance between guidance and freedom. Lewi points out that “on the one hand too much freedom [leaves] the user lost…yet on the other hand, too many restrictions [defeats] the hopes of an alternative mode of representation to the conventional history text[[8]](#footnote-8).”

Keeping the suggestions from this week’s readings in mind, I’m excited to see the types of projects that we will produce. Thanks to cross-disciplinary work, we have a wide range of resources available to us, and these projects should be wonderful.

Works Cited

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1. Alonzo C. Addison “The Vanishing Virtual: Safeguarding heritage's endangered digital record” (New Heritage, 2008) 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Maria Roussou “The Components of Engagement in Virtual Heritage Environments” (2003) 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Roussou 227 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Roussou 236 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Roussou 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hannah Lewi “Designing a Virtual Museum of Architectural Heritage” (2003) 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lewi 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Lewi 268. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)