Carol Bercovitch

November 10, 2009

Response 7

The readings this week focused on the integration of technology and virtual representations in archaeological research. Throughout our season at the John Brown House we have documented our weekly digs on the Internet. These readings emphasized other ways we can embrace technology as we head into the analysis and publication phases of our project.

Alonzo Addison gives a broad overview of the benefits and challenges of virtual heritage—“the use of digital technologies to *record, model, visualize*, and *communicate* cultural and natural heritage” (Addison, 27). The advances in rendering and documentation technologies have allowed archaeologists to record heritage sites in ways previously unknown. Addison sees the lack of format standardization and hesitancy among archaeologists to share data as challenges to the success of the virtual heritage field. To overcome these issues Addison has several suggestions that I think would be useful for us to take into account at the John Brown House. First, he urges archaeologists to document the data as extensively as possible with measurements, descriptions, photos, and any biases or manipulations. The next step is to make the project accessible to a greater community, which we plan to accomplish through the Internet and class presentations (Addison, 38-39).

Hannah Lewi focuses both on data representation and the experience of the user, comparing a “virtual museum” to its physical predecessor, the Western Australian Museum. In creating a CD-ROM mimicking the museum experience, Lewi and her colleagues explored how to present multimedia presentation in a cohesive narrative, easily navigated by the user. After exploring the Greene Farm archaeology project website, I was able to see the different ways Lewi’s techniques can be applied.

Throughout the course we have discussed how archaeologists can convey information to a community, be it academics or local residents. In the article by Maria Roussou, the author discusses the three major components of a successful virtual heritage production; representation, experience design, and interaction (Roussou, 226-7). Roussou examines how technology can be useful both as a tool for the archaeologist’s research and as a way to educate the public and stresses that, “a single model may not be sufficient to serve the needs of both scholars and non-experts” (Roussou, 31). As we work on our final projects, we must keep in mind our intended audience in designing presentations.

Each of the authors of this week’s readings explored issues and challenges we are sure to face in the upcoming weeks. A common theme in the articles is the importance of information organization. When creating an interactive environment one must take into account how the user navigates the data. We have at our disposal photos, videos, and geophysical surveys that can enhance the texts we have written over the semester. I think the biggest challenge will be the integration of traditional scholarship and data description with the newer tools of digital representation.

Works Cited:

1. Addison, Alonzo C. 2008 The Vanishing Virtual: Safeguarding heritage's endangered digital record. In Y. Kalay, T. Kvan, and J. Affleck, New Heritage: New Media and Cultural Heritage, 27-39
2. Lewi, Hannah. 2003 Designing a Virtual Museum of Architectural Heritage. In S. Kane, ed., The Politics of Archaeology and Identity in a Global Contest, 261-274.
3. Roussou, Maria. 2003 The Components of Engagement in Virtual Heritage Environments. In S. Kane, ed., The Politics of Archaeology and Identity in a Global Contest, 225-241