Jenneth Igbokwe

Professor Ryzewski

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Digitizing Archaeology and Cultural Heritage

This week’s readings focused on how archaeology and cultural heritage can be brought together in a digital manner. They explain the advantages and disadvantages of such digital contexts and how they affect and reflect the actual artifacts and excavations being presented. Within the context of the John Brown House, little improvement is needed in this aspect, because of the different types of technology we use and incorporate into the class.

At the John Brown House, we have put in a great deal of effort to compile nearly all of our work online. Though the majority is not available to the public, all of our final projects will be. We hope that they contribute to the resources already available concerning the Brown and Hale-Ives families.

In his article Addison describes how “the ‘sexy’ sites get disproportionate and often competing attention, while other less known or recognized sites languish” (Addison 2008: 30). I could potentially see this as a problem for some of the historic properties in Providence that are owned by the Rhode Island Historical Society. I feel as though its “big-money ticket” is the John Brown House, so whatever funds they may have might significantly go towards the upkeep and maintenance of the museum, as opposed to the other lesser known properties, which may be in need of serious repairs.

I found Lucas’s introduction incredibly interesting. Being the beginner that I am, I would never question the format of the site report. He also discusses the development of specialisms in archaeology, which seem especially relevant to my own work. For my final project, I will be analyzing the artifact sherds from the recent construction site. I will be working exclusively with ceramics in order to identify their functions and origins, which I find to be a good thing. If I had to analyze artifacts beyond the scope of ceramics, I would have much more on my plate.

The virtual museum, as described by Lewi, seems to be, at least in my opinion, a great idea. There are thousands of people in the world who will never have a chance to experience certain museums due to reasons such as location or financial circumstances, which is why bringing the museum to the public is such a necessity. Just by looking at the photocopy, one can tell the visuals are of excellent quality. Its organization also allowed for vivid interrelationships and orders between things to be clear to the viewer (Lewi 2003: 267). The experience is very similar to that of a physical museum. This is definitely something that the JBH could get behind. In relation to our own work, many of the final projects involve the use of multimedia such as the interactive landscape tour of the JBH. In this aspect, I don’t believe there is anything we need to improve upon, since most, if not all, final projects are going on the internet.

Rousso describes the three most important components of virtual heritage as representation, experience design, and interaction (Roussou 2003: 227). That being said, in relation to the JBH excavations, I believe the site has not yet reached the level of celebrity that is needed to make such an endeavor worthwhile. Our excavations are still relatively small and young, and we still have much to learn and discover before virtual heritage becomes a necessity. However, if we were to digitize our excavations, we would face the same problems that Roussou describes in the article, such as the issues of subjectivity in making interpretations, since there is already so little information on the families.

In conclusion, I think we are doing a great job in maintaining a wiki, which makes it easier to disseminate information between one another. Hopefully, someday our excavation site will go completely digital, because of the growing interest in historical archaeology in Rhode Island.

Works Cited

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