Ariana Gunderson

**Literature Review**

**Designing a Virtual Museum of Architectural Heritage**

*Hannah Lewi*

In this article, Lewi examines the successes, challenges, and possibilities of a Virtual Museum, utilizing the CD “Visualising the Architecture of Federation” as a case study. Her main observation is that virtual museums and physical museums each have benefits the other lacks. Virtual museums have the capacity to cross-catalogue information and allow visitors to explore the objects and information in an order other than how they are arranged geographically (primarily via hyperlink). Physical museums, on the other hand, have real objects and a certain social, experiential quality that virtual museums could never emulate.

In summary, though virtual museums allow more freedom of movement through the exhibits than physical museums do, Lewi posits that they do not provide the same experience for a visitor. For this reason, Lewi is confident that virtual museums will never outstrip physical museums in popularity, but that they serve as an excellent alternative or supplement to physical exhibitions.

**The Vanishing Virtual**

*Alonzo Addison*

Addison uses this article to charge researchers with the task of making virtual records of research (3-D models, pictures, videos, etc) more accessible to other researchers. He then lists the dangers of not cooperating (redundant research, lost opportunities to build upon previous scholarship, etc.). Addison hopes that through collections such as the UNESCO Online World Heritage Portal, practices of sharing between researchers, and cohesion between data formats, all would benefit.

**The Components of Engagement in Virtual Heritage Environments**

*Maria Roussou*

Roussou recognizes the widespread appeal of Virtual Reality technology in the dissemination of information (for both entertainment and research) and the importance the technology could have for museums, archaeologists, and other researchers. She identifies three main components that VR designers should keep in mind when creating new content: Representation, Experience, and Interaction.

With regards to representation, Roussou discusses the importance of authenticity and its constant rival, photorealism. Roussou advises that the degree to which exact authenticity is achieved in VR (perhaps at the expense of spectacle) should be decided based on the audience of the work. Reconstruction of the past is always somewhat subjective, and Roussou advises that for researchers, fewer assumptions should be made, whereas hypotheses can be executed in VR aimed at the general public. Roussou identifies many important factors inherent to success in a VR installation, such as human presence, character involvement, engaging the visitors’ interest, empathy, and imagination, etc. The issue of Interaction within a VR exhibit is a consistent challenge, Roussou notes. Some institutions have utilized human guides as a method of engaging visitors, while others have used more digital methods of engagement.

In conclusion, Roussou acknowledges the complexity of Virtual Reality in recreating the past, but also its incredible possiblities.

**Splitting Objects**

*Gavin Lucas*

In this chapter, Lucas examines the history of archaeological classification, as well as the specialization of archaeologists. He relates that finds are divided from features because archaeology was originally focused on collection of objects. Additionally, the earliest museums divided their objects by material, something retained in archaeological excavation today.

**Discussion**

I found Lucas’ article to be informative, if a little wordy. The examples he gave of the history of classification and its controversies were appropriate and informative, but not quite engaging.

I was very interested in the articles discussing the issues and possibilities of digital heritage. I am very much a kinesthetic learner and I am attached to the physical experience of being in museums, and a digital experience could never provide the immersive, liminal experience of a museum. On the other hand, digital exhibitions are accessible to all[[1]](#footnote--1) regardless of geographical location, creating a wider audience.

The possibilities provided by technological advances for preserving and curating the archeological record are infinite, and the first three readings for this week explore some areas of current work. Though some of these articles are old enough that the technology that they discuss has become obsolete, the ideas explored in them maintain importance as archaeology expands ever further into the realm of technology.

I agree with Addison on the topic of accessibility of previous research. Redundancy of research is painful when the possibility of sharing between scholars is so attainable. More portals such as the UNESCO World Heritage Portal will help, but a culture of sharing research between scholars is first required. All will benefit from increased ‘copyleft’ measures, and scholars can more easily build on work completed by others.

In addition to more collaboration between researchers, I support the expansion of digital exhibitions like the one discussed in Lewi’s article. I think digital exhibitions that accompany physical museum exhibitions would be quite popular, both as souvenirs and for those who are unable to travel to the location of the exhibit. Unlike Lewi, I can imagine that one day the popularity of digital exhibitions will eclipse that of physical exhibitions, if only because they are not limited by geography.

As Lewi discussed, digital exhibitions offer the chance for visitors to examine the objects in various orders and configurations, not only the way they are geographically arranged by the curator. The opportunity to hyperlink between objects encourages visitor engagement and allows the visitor to curate their own experience based on their interests. For example, in an exhibit featuring many civilizations with objects grouped chronologically, someone particularly interested in textiles could examine all of the textiles in the order of their choice in a digital exhibition, whereas in a physical one the visitor is somewhat limited by the curator’s placement of objects. On the other hand, digital exhibitions may be too confusing—having so much information organized in several ways might be too much for visitors to process.

The components that Roussou urges Virtual Reality designers to consider are all valid, though I feel she did not provide any meaningful discussion on the issue of Interaction. Acknowledging the component’s difficult place in the design of VR exhibits, Roussou mentions use of both human and digital engagement, but does not suggest other solutions.

I believe that the positive outcomes that could be gained from increased use of digital heritage methods far outweigh their individual drawbacks. Though modern technology does not offer an immersive, museum-like experience for the technology that the average person has access to, I am confident that in future this will be attainable. Additionally, the digital preservation of artifacts allows wider access and can foster more collaborative scholarship.

1. All who have access to the technology to view them, though that is a different issue. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)