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Session Title:

Art, Archaeology and Technology: Current Experiments in Interpretation

Format:

15-20 Minute Papers followed by discussion to conclude

Session Abstract:

Archaeologists have been rapidly integrating new media technologies into their interpretive schemes through a variety of methods. Virtual worlds, social networking websites, blogs, wikis, and digital photo mash-ups are becoming legitimate alternate ways to present archaeological information. The greater availability of inexpensive equipment and software that is powerful and easy to use has provided a lower entry point for remixing photography, film, and databases into multimodal presentations and increased the potential for archaeologists to use these media to tell their own stories. This, combined with the growing ubiquity of online, collaborative media platforms has allowed us to reach out to new audiences by integrating archaeology into a greater social sphere. Archaeologists have built too many technological islands in the form of isolated websites, soon abandoned after the project ends. While new media technologies do provide a venue for ongoing dialogue in a broader public context, what are the implications of this for archaeology? In a conference that is fully engaged with questions regarding the future of archaeology, this session explores interpretive projects inspired by new media art and technology. In this exploration we will discuss alternate narratives, collective actions and what it means to be an archaeologist in the digital age. Alternate forms of papers and presentations such as films or websites are welcome.

List of Participants:

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Virtual Reality and Presentation of the Archaeological Heritage in Spain: Present and Future

The current society requests an easier understanding of the archaeological remains. This implies the necessity for the managers of heritage for innovating in its techniques of presentation. In this sense, despite the numerous advances carried out, virtual reality applied to the presentation of the archaeological heritage is still a field insufficiently explored, but however, it offers a enormous potential providing its multiple advantages. In spite of it, it is necessary to establish a series of basic principles that allow us apply with guarantees all these technological advances without decreasing the historical and interpretative rigorousness and the scientific character of our contributions.

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Electric Archaeology: Archaeology in and archaeology of, “Second Life”

Archaeology is about material culture, about exploring the human condition (not necessarily in the past) through how we create and manipulate objects. In recent years, the power of computers has opened up new universes for exploration, places where individuals create the worlds around them. This paper discusses my archaeological explorations in the current leading virtual world, ‘Second Life’. This world deserves archaeological study, indeed needs archaeological study in that it is nothing but pure construction of will and imagination. ‘Virtual Worlds’ are in themselves nothing new: from the Hanging Gardens of Babylon to Disneyland in Florida, humans have been creating fantastical worlds for many different purposes, with simple entertainment not necessarily the prime motivation. Building on these observations, the paper discusses my own attempts to alter this world for archaeological outreach: a re-usable archaeological excavation.

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A 3D Window to the Past: Embracing the Stories of a Gambian Slave Trading Site

Many archaeologists are recognizing the need to unmask the silenced voices and stories about the

past. The use of innovative media that incorporates 3D modeling, virtual worlds, video, and social networking websites can be used to give voice to subaltern histories and interpretive understandings about the past. They can also be used to educate wider audiences, involve different communities in all stages of archaeological research and conservation, and open critical dialogue that recognizes the role of social relations in generating contesting histories. Multi-media technologies are being applied to the James Island World Heritage site in The Gambia, West Africa. This area was important in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and as a center of commodity exchange. Using this site as a model, this paper highlights how media technologies can be used to construct more representative pasts, assist the development of better cultural resource management strategies, and draw attention from diverse audiences.

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In Search of New Voices and Platforms: “2 Million Years of South African Heritage” Pilot Heritage Filler Production on Mapungubwe World Heritage Site”

In South Africa, the predominant form of disseminating archaeological information is through academic publications almost exclusively accessed at tertiary level. Voices of archaeological interpretation remain exclusive and so is accessibility to archaeological data. South Africa does not enjoy a reading culture; majority of the population is audio-visual oriented. Furthermore, the growing multimedia platforms including internet are not accessible to the majority. This is a presentation on a pilot Heritage Filler Broadcast Production on the Mapungubwe Cultural Landscape World Heritage Site. What is unique about this pilot is that it was produced by youths, as opposed to specialized producers featuring old established academics; it is a three-minutes filler (as opposed to usual 24 or 52 minutes documentaries used in the broadcasting industry); and the production uses filming methods that involve minimum site intervention (as opposed to the traditional expensive approaches of setting scenes on site).

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Envisioning archaeology: Helping the public see what we see.

“I paint objects as I think them; not as I see them” - Pablo Picasso As archaeologists, how are we visually communicating our interpreted excavation results to the public? The net conclusion from any excavation should be the final interpretation: the understanding of how the site looked and/or functioned. Visually, this is best communicated by means of an artistic interpretation or technical reconstruction. However, excavations record facts based on the surviving remains, whereas interpretations require some degree of conjecture so that others can see meaning - combining the certain with the uncertain to form a visual model. So, how should we visually communicate the uncertain? In this paper I will examine how the interpreted results from a range

of archaeological excavations in Ireland have been communicated using published 2D and 3D visualisations. The aim is to discuss how and why we visually communicate and to examine how should we paint what we think.

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Architecture & Identity: Exploring expressions of identity in some Plantation-era Munster houses.

This presentation would be in two sections: a brief paper contextualising the material and a short film exploring expressions of identity in some architecture of plantation-era Munster, Ireland. Put simply, Plantation-era Munster had three population groups: the new English settlers, the indigenous Gaelic-Irish, and the old English settlers with roots in the twelfth century colonisation. The 'New English', 'Old English' and Gaelic-Irish expressed their identities relative to each other in architectural culture. The situation was complex: binarisms were at constant interplay and flux (England/Ireland, Protestant/Catholic, male/female and ideal/reality among others). Using those binarisms as a starting point, I propose to edit a short film using a study group of plantation-era Munster houses in Cork and a script from *The Faerie Queene* (a contemporary text) to explore the expression of identity between the three groups in their use of architecture.

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Building Archaeological Narratives With New Media

Advances in social media allow archaeologists to interpret, transmit, and remix archaeological data in new and exciting ways. In engaging with these new technologies, archaeologists reflexively interact with the archaeological record and with the greater public. Along with this expanded potential there are considerable problems when these new technologies are applied without an understanding of new media theory and its utility in conceptualizing digital data in the social world. Using current projects performed at the Presidio of San Francisco and from Çatalhöyük, I will provide examples of simple, inexpensive, and practical ways to integrate new media practice into archaeological methodology at all stages. Finally, I will critically examine future directions for new media practice in archaeology.