

Communication in Archaeology

The use of Multimedia Devices in Communicating Ancient Pasts

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Abstract. This paper reports the contributions to the workshop "Communication in Archaeology" held at CAA2004.

1. Introduction

In the last two decades archaeological research has been able to completely modify the observation, interpretation and communication of ancient cultural processes and material culture, fighting against monolithic methods of analysis and introducing diverse angles from which to view ancient worlds (Laneri 2002). From amongst this process, communication towards a general public has been one of the most important concerns for archaeologists (Moser 2001) who can no longer be considered as simple diggers, but must also act as storytellers or directors of theatrical plays, performances and musical soundtracks (Tilley 1993: 13).

In so doing, archaeology has followed other branches of human studies, such as the case of the visual anthropology subdiscipline (see Banks and Morphy 1997) that has recently become one of the most important analytical tools for the understanding and interpretation of the "human experience" (Banks 1998: 9). Following this interpretative perspective, visual and other non-written media have been used to explore "human sociality [...] through objects and bodies, landscapes and emotions, as well as thought" (*ibid.* 1998: 19).

Thus, the archaeologists should also follow this way of thought in stimulating the concept of communicating archaeological processes, permanently breaking down boundaries between performers and the audience, between academia, museums and the "external" world (Shanks 1996). One of the outcomes of archaeological research should be the constant use of different media (photography, video, audio, 3D models, writing, smelling, cartoons, etc.) to experiment with the creation of various communicative languages (Banks 1998; Hodder 1999; Pluciennik 1999; Pearson and Shanks 2001).

The representation of the past in the present should be thought of as a dynamic project in which stories, reconstruction of ancient landscapes, and other messages related to ancient pasts are created through multidimensional and interacting experiences between the creators of the message (archaeologists, actors, artists, etc.) and the receivers (public), in other words, a sort of fictional narration in which the narrated stories function as representations of a true past

(Barthes 1977: 123), thus a form of archaeology that is available for consumption in a non-archaeological world (Mort 1990).

2. Multimedia Devices in Archaeology

With this perspective in mind, the use of multimedia devices increasingly become a fundamental tool in enhancing the quality level of the discourse between academia and the "outer world". The workshop, organized by the two authors during the course of the last conference dedicated to Computer Applications in Archaeology (CAA) held in Prato on 13 April 2004, has planned for wishes to further investigate three different aspects of the relation between multimedia technology and the process of narrating stories of ancient pasts: the theoretical premises, the concept of "edutainment", some technical aspects.

From a theoretical point of view the session had the target to increase the debate about archaeological representation and: how "the popular dimensions of archaeological representation" (Moser 2001: 263), such as "Tomb Raider", "Age of Empire", "Gladiator", "Neanderthal", and other forms of narration of ancient pasts to the general public, should play a role in the interpretation and presentation of ancient material culture in the present (Pearson and Shanks 2001: 46–50; Jameson *et al.* 2003);

how interactive communication tools can create entertaining and training interactive games for young people and students, to push them on the way of knowledge of the cultural heritage and specifically the historic-archaeological heritage;

how to avoid academic jargons within an archaeological discourse and acknowledge the importance of the general public in the interaction with ancient pasts.

The present workshop put together different international experiences examples of museum installations, virtual reconstructions, CD-Roms for educational purposes, World Wide Web sites, videogames, cartoons, used to further demonstrate the importance of technological devices in communicating ancient pasts.

3. International Experiences

“The ARTaeology Experience”

Nicola Laneri and Stefano Mascitelli (University of Naples – L’Orientale)

Laneri and Mascitelli show us how is strictly necessary to develop the field of performing archaeology and the interaction between academia and the living communities for the definition and narration of ancient pasts in modern contexts. Furthermore, the interactive approaches developed by the components of “The ARTaeology Experience” enhance the communication of ancient and modern cultural processes to the general public. For them, material culture is represented by all objects consumed in the past, recent or remote, from the ancient ritual to the use of a Coca-cola bottle. Thus, the public should be stimulated by the ancient material culture as it is by the contemporaneous one. They also invite us to participate, through different forms of interactions, in the projects of “The ARTaeology Experience”. The only requirement is to share in the ability to communicate the diversity of human structures using any type of contemporaneous art-form, such as music, painting, cinema, sounds, performance, and conferences, ultimately creating diverse languages which communicate cultural processes, both ancient and contemporaneous.

The experiment presented at the workshop, “Alu”, has the aim to apply such a modern type of communication, a Macromedia Flash™ musical video-clip, to on an Old Akkadian exorcism text from the *Udug hul* series in order to give it, through its “rap-song” pattern, a new performed life and a different way of telling stories about ancient pasts.

“Indy, Lara and Hercule – How the media influence the popular notion of archaeologists – an exhibition”

Kathrin Felder, Juliane Lippok, and Mareile Wulf

In October 2002 the authors started a project tutorial aimed at the organization of exhibitions dedicated to the relation between archaeology and the general public because they regarded at this issue as an essential and necessary one for future perspectives in any academic discourse linked to archaeology.

The first step of the authors has been to examine how archaeology is presented in the popular media and how this creates or reconfirms a special perception and association of archaeology amongst public recipients. Thus the depiction of archaeologists as professionals and of the exercise of their academic discipline in movies, novels and videogames was analysed. Materials for the exhibition showed recurring clichéd stereotypes of archaeologists – such as ‘The Adventurer’, ‘The Bringer of Doom’, etc – that emphasis icons like Indiana Jones and Lara Croft. Furthermore, the authors attended to genres that showed parallels to methods (detective stories) and scientific questions (Science Fiction) of archaeology. Antitypes in reality such as Heinrich Schliemann and Howard Carter were offered and the preceding ‘fictional’ part was set in contrast to real exercised archaeology in order to address and inform non-academics.

“Theory and premises”

Juliane Lippok

Juliane Lippok points out on how today computers and consoles are present in nearly every household and how children and adults spend their spare time playing. The aim of dealing with these questions is to draw a clearer picture of the image of archaeology in the public mind by examining one of the newest branches of entertainment media: videogames with archaeological themes. Videogames, in the author’s mind, tend to support the identification of the player with the protagonist of the game: it is very attractive for the user to play characters which are more or less exotic and do not have much in common with his or her daily life and to travel to times and places s/he has usually no access to or which do not even exist. We learned, through Juliane’s work, how in the public consciousness many images are projected onto the archaeologist and archaeology which fulfil such needs as to get in touch with the exotic and mystic. This fact helps to clarify why archaeology and its matters are so often depicted in videogames. Additionally at regular intervals archaeology as subject of videogames is connected with other genres as for instance Sci-Fi (Science Fiction) and detective stories. On this basis, it is possible to draw parallels to other kinds of media, which can help to complete the knowledge.

“Multimedia technologies and disabled access to heritage”

Marc Johnstone

Johnstone faced the extreme frustrating difficulty for disabled visitors to gain access to all areas of heritage sites, with the physical limitations of architecture, or the remoteness of location typically restricting their experience, and guided us into the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne’s experience using technologies to overcome these limitations. In recent times, in the UK, one of the most fundamental issues regarding Information Technology in the heritage industry revolves around the Disability Discrimination Act, and how physical heritage sites themselves, and their associated websites can be made accessible for disabled visitors.

Heritage sites have to take notice of the DDA because by December 2004 it will be compulsory for all sites in the UK to provide disabled access or else face closure. Where physical access is impossible then an alternative form of access must be provided. This ‘intellectual’ access is most notably supported by Multimedia Internet technologies. Johnstone explored a variety of technological solutions utilized over the last three years at the Archaeological Research Suite of the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne to enhance the user experience of disabled visitors to heritage sites in the Northeast of England. Particularly successful experiences were: interactive touch-screen displays, bubble worlds, audio, and interactive video and animation.

**“Beyond the artifact. The CVRLab’s Museum Demonstration Project at the Ocean Institute (Dana Point, California, USA)”
Bernard Frischer and Charlie Steinmetz
(UCLA Cultural Virtual Reality Laboratory)**

In 2002–03, the CVRLab created a full-scale urban model of Port Royal, Jamaica. Port Royal was one of the biggest English colonies in the New World when it was destroyed by earthquake on June 7, 1692. Bernard Frischer and Charlie Steinmetz guided us through the Ocean Institute’s experience of a gallery devoted to finds from the underwater excavations of Donny Hamilton of Texas A&M. Sponsored by the Steinmetz Family of Los Angeles, the purpose of the CVRLab’s project was to demonstrate the power of virtual reality technology for the visualization and recontextualization of archaeological artifacts in a museum setting. Furthermore, the Port Royal’s VR project showed us the importance in using Virtual Reality for helping students of elementary and high schools in the process of understanding and interacting with the reconstruction of ancient pasts.

**“The ArcheoZone Portal interactive contents: researcher’s thoughts for public and young people”
Cinzia Perlingieri**

This contribution moved from the experience of the project “ArcheoZone” that is a web portal aimed at the dissemination of complex data from many archaeological projects conducted all over the world by the research units of University l’Orientale of Naples. Among the projects and activities that will be developed in the portal to be published in 2005, the author decided to dedicate in her paper a larger emphasis and greater importance to the creation of entertaining and training interactive tools specifically for young people and students. New media and web languages are very powerful means to communicate with young people and push them on the way of knowledge of the cultural heritage and, specifically, historic-archaeological heritage. Particularly E-Learning tools are able to improve knowledge and stimulate interest. Furthermore, Perlingieri supports us with the idea that it is possible to provide students and non professional people with specific tools — from the simple research on archaeological data, to the realization of educational interactive games, or simulations of field research — in a cheap and effective way even in the field of archaeological research. At the end, the result that the author aspires to is a complete revolution of the relationship between culture and media.

4. Discussion

“Archaeology is going multimedia” should probably be the title of future conferences and meetings investigating the importance of communicating ancient pasts to a broader public. This message is evident not only from this organized workshop, but also through the numerous papers delivered at this and other international conferences, as well as numerous other articles written by archaeologists in international journals.

It is clear from these elements that archaeology can no longer avoid the use of new media and technologies for enhancing the quality and quantity of information to be delivered outside of academia. It is almost inevitable that in the forthcoming future, archaeologists and museum managers will try to increase the visual, audio, interactive, and narrative qualities of their reconstructed pasts to further develop the non-scientific market’s interest in archaeological stories. If this will not happen, archaeology’s already weak connection with the general public will become even weaker.

In addition, for a successful result multimedia devices cannot be the only means for narrating the stories of ancient pasts; but rather they should be utilized within a larger communicative strategy in which different specialists (archaeologists, anthropologists, communicators, historians, musicians, artists etc.) should form teams to create tasks that better fit the cultural and social contexts in which the messages are delivered. The archaeological park of ‘Ename 974’ and the Ename Center in Belgium are probably some of the best examples in this direction. In calling the entire community together to directly participate in narrating the ancient stories related to the archaeological data, it exemplifies how multimedia devices can be applied to a broader cultural and social context.

Through the incorporation of such approaches by academia it should be possible to avoid the so-called ‘competition’ between fringe and scientific archaeology for authority in narrating ancient pasts. As part of this approach we believe that the specialists involved in the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the archaeological data should also interact and communicate with fringe archaeologists for a better understanding of their aims and perspectives. By removing the boundaries between scientific and non-scientific archaeology a more holistic perception of the world of archaeology can be fostered.

In conclusion, archaeologists should keep in mind the important message delivered by Merleau-Ponty (1964: 16), who many years ago said that “the world itself, which is the totality of perceptible things and the thing of all the things, must be understood ... as the universal style of all possible perceptions”. In applying his ideas to our purposes here, perceptions must also be shared through the use of diverse forms of communication in order to transform data into objective realities and usable knowledge for both the scholarly world and the general public.

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