



HARVARD
Extension School

Harvard University Extension School
Description: Distance Learning

MUSE E-133 (15155) | Performing the Digital Museum

For centuries, libraries, archives, and museums from across Europe have been the custodians of our rich and diverse cultural heritage. They have preserved and provided access to the testimonies of knowledge, beauty, and imagination, such as sculptures, paintings, music, and literature. The new information technologies have created unbelievable opportunities to make this common heritage more accessible for all. Culture is following the digital path and "memory institutions" are adapting the way in which they communicate with their public (New Renaissance Report, P.4).

The New Renaissance, Report of the Comité des Sages

Can the virtual museum be a stand-alone or is it always a digital footprint of a physical museum?

The museum experience is characterized by its penchant for authenticity and originality in a space that typically casts itself the role of encapsulating science and culture for posterity. Digital artifacts, in contrast, signal endless clone-ability and a built-in temporality, where the very intangibility of the digital object inevitably becomes a provocation to the museum ethos of materiality and stability.

At the same time a museum can be performed in many different ways, resonating with the ideas expressed by sociologist Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* where he argues, perhaps in a Shakespearean way, that we present different aspects of ourselves in different situations as if we are actors (individuals) on stage and are performing in front of an audience.

This course will outline the numerous ways that information technologies, in spite of their built-in temporality, are located in the museum's ecosystem and serve to augment, amplify, and disseminate the museum experience in numerous, propitious ways. Performing the Museum in this way, serves to propel collections, exhibitions and embedded knowledge into new spaces well beyond the museum wall; directly in the palm of your hand.

In principle, the work of art has always been reproducible. Objects made by humans could always be copied by humans. Replicas were made by pupils in practicing for their craft, by masters in disseminating their works, and, finally, by third parties in pursuit of profit. But the technological reproduction of artworks is something new (Benjamin, Walter 1936)



Pre-requisites

Professional, or personal interest in Museums and Museum culture and proficiency in online environments

Learning outcomes

- **Digital museum literacy**
Fluency in reading a variety of museum websites, portals and platforms - either online or mobile - as they replicate, in miniature the digital footprint of a physical museum or act as an online focus of museum quality artifacts and exhibitions.
- **An intellectual skill-set from which to think *critically* about digital museums**
Critical thinking describes an intellectual discipline that enables conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information in order to critically reflect on concepts and norms, here in the case of the digital museum. See [The National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking](#).
For example: Can a digital museum be a stand-alone or is it always, *a priori*, a digital footprint of a physical museum?
- **Online curatorial skill-set**
In this course, theory and practice go hand-in-hand as students are required to curate an online exhibition using Pinterest. This entails gathering resources, producing images and texts, and presenting them as a coherent whole. Students are expected to produce their own thematically rich and comprehensive online exhibition for their final assessment.



Reading

Required

Benjamin Walter (1936). *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. In: Arendt Hannah, ed. *Illustrations: Walter Benjamin – Essays and Reflections*. New York: Schocken Books, 1985, pp. 217-251.

The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction ([web version](#))

Weschler, L. (1995) *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder: Pronged Ants, Horned Humans, Mice on Toast and Other Marvels of Jurassic Technology*, New York: Vintage.

Recommended

Augé, M. (1995) *Non-places: An Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, J. Howe (trans.), London: Verso.

Baudrillard, J. (2000) *Simulacra and Simulation*, Ann Arbor: University Of Michigan Press.

Doering, Z. D. (1999a) *Strangers, Guests or Clients? Visitor Experiences in Museums*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution.

Hazan S. (2006) 'A crisis of authority: old lamps for new', in *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage*, Ed. Fiona Cameron and Sarah Kenderdine, MIT Press

Lévy, P. (1998) *Becoming Virtual, Reality in the Digital Age*, New York and London: Plenum Trade.

Malraux, A. (1967) Le musée imaginaire, in *Les voix du silence*. Paris: Nouvelle Revue.

Turkle, S. (1995) *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Witcomb, A. (2003) *Re-Imagining the Museum: Beyond the Mausoleum*, London: Routledge.

Reports

The Association of Art Museum Directors, April 23, 2015

[Next Practices in Digital and Technology](#)

NMC Horizon Report March 2016

[2016 Museum Edition](#)

Smithsonian Digitization Project, January 2015

[Report](#): Museums Are Now Able to Digitize Thousands of Artifacts in Just Hours

The New Renaissance Report, 2011 [of the Comité des Sages](#)



Schedule

1. **August 30**
Introduction to the course and to Pinterest
2. **September 6**
Museums on the web | The distributed museum; authenticity, originality and clone-ability
3. **September 13**
Swiping and tapping | Museums on the smartphone; apps and more apps
4. **September 20**
Museum and Web 2.0 | The responsive museum
5. **September 27**
Social media – whose narrative is it anyway? | Case study: *Visualizing Isaiah*
6. **October 4**
Portals & aggregators | Cross-institutional collaboration
7. **October 11**
Serious gaming and the museum
8. **October 18**
Augmented reality | Pokémon in the museum
9. **October 25**
Student Pinterest projects | Discussion and proposals
10. **November 1**
3D visualization | Replacing, resizing and re-distributing
11. **November 8**
3D printing | © implications for the museum
12. **November 15**
Makers & the Flipped Museum | The digital museum as an experiential, autonomous space
13. **November 22**
Digital Horizons | 1 year, 3 years, 5 years
14. **November 29**
Curated projects | Student presentations I
15. **December 6**
Curated projects | Student presentations II
16. **December 13**
Curated projects | Student presentations III

Assignments

Website evaluation report/critique

2-3 pages | Due Sep 20
15 Points

Exhibition proposal

Due Oct 4
(not graded but compulsory)

Mobile App evaluation/critique

2-3 pages | Due Oct 25
15 Points

Final assignment Thematic exhibition (Pinterest)

Due Dec 13
30 Points

Final assignment essay on thematic exhibition

12-15 pages | Due Dec 13
30 Points

Online participation

10 Points



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