AUDIOVISUAL DOCUMENTS, DIGITAL CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ETHICS

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There are dangers in being too prescriptive about ethics. People have different ideas about what is ethical (or not) depending on circumstances. My paper aims to raise awareness of ethics as part of digital literacy and to encourage more thoughtful and informed critique of digital heritage practice.

Heritage institutions and professionals often initiate or are involved with e.g. community-based online projects; use of social media for visitor or community engagement; digital representations of heritage places and objects and audio-visual storytelling about history and heritage.

Some challenges raised by digital heritage seem more 'technical' than 'ethical' though this is also debatable. Examples include: how to manage and make best use of large amounts of digital information; ensuring future preservation of and access to digital objects; compliance with legal and ethical frameworks on digital rights and privacy; and designing technology that supports and enhances equitable access to digital content. Ethical and other issues raised by public interaction and online communication via 'social' media platforms produced by Big Tech companies are currently of wide public concern and are highly relevant to digital heritage. Given the broad scope of the general topic, I will mainly focus on ethics of digital heritage in projects involving audio-visual representation which raise ethical questions associated with 'reality', truth, authenticity and trust.

As digital projects can be costly and complicated, heritage practitioners commonly collaborate with technology and media experts who may have different ethical perspectives on their work. My paper therefore draws on discussion of ethics in technology design and digital media industries (e.g. documentary and 'factual' film and television production) as well as in the broader field of cultural heritage practices.

Digital Past 2020: New technologies in heritage, interpretation and outreach | 12 & 13 February 2020, Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Aberystwyth

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Biography

Sarah Colley trained as an archaeologist and has many years of experience working in higher education, research and professional cultural heritage practice in Australia and the UK. She has long-standing research interests in professional ethics, public archaeology, education and also the application of digital technologies in archaeology and heritage. She was involved in developing early computer visualizations for archaeology and has since worked on sustainable digital archives, image databases, video production and 'big data' applications in archaeology. She is currently an independent researcher and Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Leicester.

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