

Preserving Cultural Heritage Through Digital Media

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The apparent limitless affordances of digital technologies make them the choice media for the representation, management, and communication of cultural heritage. Digital media are used to create cultural content through scanning, modeling, and archiving; to manage that content through powerful search engines and database management tools; and to disseminate the content through the world wide web to audiences who would otherwise might never be able to access it. Yet, like every medium ever used to preserve cultural heritage, digital media is not neutral: it impacts the represented information and the ways society interprets it. Perhaps more than any older technology, it has the potential to affect the very *meaning* of the represented content in terms of the cultural image it creates. This paper examines the affordances and implications of digital media for the preservation of cultural heritage through two metaphorical paradigms: *rounding a square peg to fit a round hole*, vs. the *horseless carriage*. The first implies a dysfunctional relationship between the media and the task they are applied to, the later a misunderstanding of the affordances of the media for changing the tasks themselves. Both paradigms are used to argue that much more research is needed before we can unequivocally recommend New Media as a vehicle for preservation of cultural heritage.