

Online heritage as source for material research assignment

Type: Short assignment

Learning objectives

- Students learn to engage with the web in an academic way. This includes: contextualizing online objects and relating them to academic research and publications.

Assignment suggestion

In this assignment, we ask you to think about how material content is translated into the online world, and what implications digitization and online display have for how we understand and research the histories of objects. Begin with selecting one story from a tour on *Inventing Europe*. For the object used in the story item, note:

- a) What is its physical counterpart? (i.e. what does it *represent*? eg. a photo, a three-dimensional object, a taped sound recording, etc.)
- b) Does that physical counterpart still exist?
- c) What aspects of the object does the story on Inventing Europe bring forward? Does it talk about what this object represented? Does it talk about the way these kinds of objects were used? Does it talk about the story of this specific object? Are those aspects visible in its digital representation?
- d) What other aspects of the object does its representation emphasize?

Now scroll down to the “What’s like this?” section and ask the same questions for 5 relevant related objects. Would you be able to analyze them all in comparable ways? Based on your observations, write a 1-page essay, or create a 5-minute video, in which you address the question: what kinds of stories do the digital objects allow us to tell? What kinds of stories can’t we tell? How could these be improved? - Alec Badenoch, Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

Approach

This assignment takes place online at Inventing Europe by making use of the “What’s like this?” section that can be found below each of the stories in the tours.

1. When preparing for this assignment, please take into account the “Tips for use”. You can adjust the approach to your own preferences.
2. Introduce the assignment to your students.
3. Let your students read the article by Sarah de Rijcke and Anne Beaulieu (see reading suggestions).
4. Let your students select a tour of their interest, or one of the tours of your choice, and let them read one of its stories (see “Tips for use”, tip 1).
5. Let your students reflect on the object via the questions posed in the above “Assignment suggestion”.
6. Now have your students answer the same questions for 5 objects within the “What’s like this?” section that is found below the story they just examined (see “Tips for use”, tip 2).
7. Make your students think about whether they are able to analyze these related objects in comparable ways.
8. Let your students make their assignment, addressing the questions: What kinds of stories do the digital objects allow us to tell? What kinds of stories can’t we tell? How could these be improved? (See “Tips for use”, tip 3).

Tips for use

1. If your course deals with a specific topic, such as “food” or “history of informatics”, you have the option to preselect tours from *Inventing Europe* that you want your students to work with during this assignment.
2. The “What’s like this?” section holds considerable object information. When you click on an object, a pop-up opens. The pop-up shows a large image, plays (audio)-visual materials (if available), and shows extensive object metadata. When you want to examine if there is more metadata available, you can find within the metadata the option “View item at” *Europeana*.
3. The above “Assignment suggestion” refers to two evaluation options, either a 1-page essay, or a 5-minute video. Feel free to select the form of inquiry of your choice.

Reading suggestions

- De Rijcke, Sarah & Anne Beaulieu (2011): “Image as Interface: Consequences for Users of Museum Knowledge” *Library Trends*, 59:4, 663-685.
<https://annebeaulieu.files.wordpress.com/2011/06/imageasinterface-librarytrends.pdf>

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