Review of Ruecker, Stan, Milena Radzikowska, Stéfan Sinclair (2011) *Visual Interface Design for Digital Cultural Heritage: a guide to rich prospect browsing*. Ashgate. 978-1-4094-0422-4. £49.50.

When contrasting the experience of using a physical cultural heritage collection with its digital presence it is often observed that it can be difficult to get a sense of the whole collection from the digital version. Furthermore, in a physical setting such as that of a museum the positioning of artefacts may help the viewer not only to gain an overview of the extent of a collection but also to discover temporal or thematic interrelationships between artefacts as a result of the ways they are arranged in cases, and the way those cases are in turn arranged in a section of a museum. This information is frequently lost in the digital surrogate where the predominant use of search boxes does not allow such information to readily be discovered. Ross et al (2012) have also demonstrated the difficulties that can be encountered when using plain text strings to search for images of items in the British Museum's online catalogue. This book convincingly argues that rich-prospect browsing can solve these issues and is particularly useful for digital heritage collections.

Rich-prospect browsing is built upon a number of principles (summarised on p.3) but at the most fundamental level it combines an image or other visual signifier of every artefact in a collection along with tools for interacting with them. The book also sets out a theoretical basis for rich prospect browsing and its wide-ranging discussion of such browsing is grounded by reference to the innovative research that the authors have been involved in, such as the rich-prospect Mandala browser (http://mandala.humviz.org/) and the MONK project (http://monkpublic.library.illinois.edu/monkmiddleware/public/index.html) which allows patterns in texts to be identified and studied. The book also makes an important contribution

to debates within the Digital Humanities community about the nature of prototypes and other experimental work. Building on earlier work (Galey and Ruecker 2010) this book explores in a sustained way the idea that a prototype is an embodiment of a theory or an interpretation of the meaning of the collection that it is representing. Thus, they argue, '[j]ust as we look for an argument to be contestable, defensible and substantive … so we can look for these aspects in a prototype, in effect reading it as a contribution in the ongoing scholarly activity of thinking through prototypes' (p.21).

Chapter 1 forms the introduction to the volume. In addition to giving an overview of rich-prospect browsing relevant issues such as the difficulty of studying users and the authors' position on the nature of prototypes are delineated. Chapter 2 sets out essential preliminary theoretical considerations. The work of Gibson on 'affordances', which, he argued can be understood as possibilities for activity in the environment of a given user, is introduced (p. 56-74). So too is the work of Appleton and his idea of 'prospect' or a representation of something that lets the user grasp the essence of what an e.g. collection affords without being in possession of a complete representation of it (p. 29-56); this theoretical discussion is accompanied by examples of new affordances that can be facilitated by rich prospect browsing. Drawing on the theories of prospect and affordance this chapter explores what is particular to rich-prospect interfaces and also builds a theoretical foundation that can be used to study, evaluate and refine 'real world' examples of rich prospect browsing interfaces. Chapter 3 discusses the problem of 'category error' or when two incomparable items are compared. As this is a problem that can occur when studying new affordances created through rich-prospect browsing this chapter focuses on a new approach built around the comparison of affordance strength instead of the comparison of affordances. The chapter

also provides an excellent overview of user testing strategies. Chapter 4 centres on technological approaches to making items in a collection machine readable, for example, with XML or by using keywords. This is accompanied by a discussion of the characteristics that make existing collections amenable to rich prospect browsing along with practical advice about, inter alia, collection scope and format. Chapter 5 focuses not on the content of digital cultural heritage collections but on the markup that is often applied to it to make it searchable and machine readable. While it is common for XML and XML-based languages to be applied to digital cultural heritage collections, and digital humanities projects in general, it tends to remain hidden from the end-user. For in-browser display purposes the content is often converted to HTML or XHTML and the XML that is used to encode the material and make it searchable is often kept hidden, especially if the transformation is done server-side. This chapter considers what a user might gain from being able to search and explore the markup that is applied to a collection (as distinct from the contents of the collection itself). Chapter 6 treats of the design of rich prospect interfaces and tools. The design of such interfaces is important in order to ensure that a user can be given an overview of a collection without overwhelming them. Issues such as large-format displays are discussed in detail and the concept of interaction histories introduced. Chapter 7 is the conclusion.

Many aspects of the book have relevance beyond the context of browsing Digital Cultural Heritage collections. For example, as mentioned above, chapter 5 focuses on the XML encoding that is frequently applied to digital cultural heritage collections. Here the authors muse on "the kinds of information that the user might obtain by having prospect on the tag set, and how these kinds of information might be applied in understanding and accessing a collection" (p.27). The authors' argument that an interface can embody an argument about a

collection is a relatively new one. However, in the context of Digital Humanities, the position

that markup (such XML) is used to make explicit an interpretation of text is widely agreed

upon. How do these arguments intersect with one another in terms of the interpretative layers

that are embedded in digital cultural heritage objects? To what extent are such issues parts of

basic digital literacy among those who use digital cultural heritage collections? To what

extent are those who use digital cultural heritage collections aware that the paths they can

search and, to some extent, the results they retrieve are directly related to what are, at their

core, a series of interpretative interventions that has been made on that collection by? It

seems to me that this deserves attention beyond the digital humanities and digital cultural

heritage communities and that possibility of having prospect on an object's tag set is an

important step in investigating this.

This book is not a 'how– to' manual and for a detailed discussion of the technical and other

details of designing rich-prospect browsers readers will need to look elsewhere. Instead this

book provides an excellent scholarly introduction to the theory, scope and nature of rich-

prospect browsers and browsing.

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Ross, C., Terras, M., Motyckova, V. (2012). Scholarly Information Seeking Behaviour in the British Museum Online Collection. In Hughes, L. (2012). Evaluating & Measuring the Value, Use and Impact of Digital Collections. (pp. 85-102). London: Facet.

Galey, A. & Ruecker, S., 2010. How a Prototype Argues. *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 25(4), pp.405–424.