

**Lisa Snyder and Elaine Sullivan on Digital Karnak and VSim  
CAA THATCamp, New York  
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**I. Introduction**

- Alice Lynn provides overview of Digital Task Force project and introduction to Digital Karnak, Lisa Snyder, and Elaine Sullivan

**II. Presentation**

Lisa Snyder:

- the software is NEH funded, the purpose was to work with 3D content
- Project was specifically designed to think of 3D content in academic context
- Limited options for publication and peer review for 3D content right now
- In the past, one would write a narrative about the content, create a video, or show single frame images
- Replacing static content with 3D viewers was one of the first applications of this content with publishing
- This project is trying to re-contextualize 3D in academia
- The model itself is a form of scholarship
- Question of how to put new “publications” out for review? How do you find people willing to review interactive content?
- VSim includes three features/abilities:
  - o Navigate 3D world
  - o Build linear narratives within the 3D world
  - o Embed files, annotations, metadata, etc. within a virtual environment

Elaine Sullivan

- Digital Karnak completed in 2008
- Interactive model has never been widely distributed
- Release of VSim prototype offers one potential solution and creates new methods for peer review
- Digital work can only be judged in its native environment
- Karnak Temple: 32 major phases of construction over 2000 years
- Chose to select a section of this history (period of eight kings/200 years of growth)
- Heavily annotated with information about architectural elements, citations, etc.
- Goal in merging Digital Karnak and VSim is to provide a model for borne digital scholarship review
  
- Each period has a global note about the period and links to more resources
- The Feature Index is a guide
- Thumbnails take you into narratives, including an overview and graphic legend
- Time slide feature
- Also possible to zoom in to see details related to art and architectural history
- Images of the interior blocks include annotations explaining the images

- The changing images over time tell the story of political changes and propaganda
- “Spatially aware resources” link to different spaces within the temple (and include links, discussions, debates, model renderings, bibliographies, photographs, etc.)
- Allows viewer to think about larger spatial relationships
- Two types of interaction:
  - Local and global resources allow user to “fly freely”
  - Narratives are more directed

### III. Q&A

- Linda Downs: Did you consider looking at gaming technology?
  - Yes, looked at projects that use it. But game tech caters to the whims of gamers, not academics, so wanted to use something more stable.
- Does it need constant updating?
  - It is a stand-alone package, so it can be downloaded (download both software and model). It would only need to be updated if VSim is no longer recognized, but this is probably 5–10 years out.
- Can you speak more about the resiliency issue?
  - It is a challenge. Can’t predict what computing will be like in 10 years. We tried to create video content that will be more sustainable. Lately, have been talking about ways to print out narratives. Right now the program only accommodates simple screen grabs, but a new NEH grant will allow us to continue building software.
- Linda Downs: What would be your idea of peer review for understanding this technology?
  - We would want reviewers to spend time with the model. The work is equivalent to creating a book, so it needs the same amount of time to engage with it (not just seconds).
- Peer review and distribution seem tied together. Is there a possibility for adding citations as indirect peer review? Need to create a community in order to create peers.
  - Until we have platforms for peer review, there is not a lot of motivation for people to understand these projects. We need to grow a group of people who already use this software and can engage with the academic content. We tried to make VSim as unthreatening as possible.
- Alice Lynn: Have you used this program with students?
  - Yes, and used it for presentations. Find it really effective, because able to quickly jump back and forth and set up views in advance. Lots of control, so don’t need to worry about presentations not going as planned in the moment.
  - Students are more interested in Karnak and get more out of it (e.g. They don’t realize the full scale of the temple until they “walk through it.” More effective than just looking at images or maps.)
- Why did you choose Karnak?

- Karnak has a long history with many phases, so it is difficult to think about how it looked in different phases by just visiting it today.
- Not just about “adding” things, but also removing them.
- Alice Lynn: Can you talk about data gathering?
  - Karnak has been under excavation for over 100 years, so there is a lot of published material available for use.
  - 95% of project based on published and publically available material
  - Also visited site to take high-res images to capture textures (Karnak has public access and open site)
- How doe the collaborative/cross-disciplinary nature impact peer review?
  - 16 people were involved in project, so it can’t be ascribed to 1 person.
  - Question of dividing credit is difficult and don’t know the answer yet.
- What about the interdisciplinary nature of reviewers?
  - Different content needs new method of peer review. It needs to be re-conceptualized.
  - More open? More people? More people from different fields?
  - Need wider audience in the beginning.
  - It would be helpful to others to have this process be public (something between peer review and a book review).
- Are there statements explaining why certain decisions were made?
  - Yes. Started writing an explanatory text that explains decisions in depth. Creates a more robust discussion. These projects should have templates attached to them, including goals, intended audience, choices, etc. to help guide reviewers.
  - Need some type of text that might appear more like a traditional article.
- Issue of usability. It seems like having users as reviewers is important.
  - Yes, the project has different levels of users (students, scholars, etc.), but that happens with traditional publishing too. Goals tied to intended audience must be clearly defined.
- Linda Downs: Is development of peer review system part of requirement of the NEH funding?
  - The funding is related to sustainability and archiving. Peer review issues are more of a pet issue for the people involved. We want this material to be incorporated into larger scholarship, tenure review, etc., which it can’t right now.
  - We want it to be inserted into academic conversation in an official way.