Reflecting the Past and Present: 19th-Century Humanities in a Digital Age

A Symposium on the Digital Humanities

(*All sessions scheduled for the Ensminger Room, Kildee Hall)

8:15-8:45 Arrival & light breakfast buffet

8:45-9:00 Welcome:
  Beate Schmittmann, Dean, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS)
  Chris Hopkins, Director, Center for Excellence in the Arts and Humanities (CEAH)

9:00-10:00 Natalie Houston, University of Massachusetts-Lowell
  “Reading Victorian Poetry in the New Nineteenth-Century Archive”

10:00-10:15 break

10:15-11:15 Anne Helmreich, Texas Christian University
  “Late to the Party? Art History and the Digital Humanities”

11:15-11:30 break

11:30-1:00 Lunch-Discussion Tables
  topical discussions and networking with guest speakers

1:00-1:15 break

1:15-2:15 Peter Capuano, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
  “Novel Criticism: Computational Research and the Future of the Scholarly Monograph”

2:15-2:30 break

2:30-3:30 Dino Felluga, Purdue University
  “The Eventuality of the Digital”

3:30-3:45 break

3:45-5:00 Panel discussion: Capuano, Felluga, Helmreich, Houston
  Challenges and Opportunities in Digital Humanities: Institutions, Funding, Value
  Moderator: Sean Grass, Department of English
Natalie Houston  
*Reading Victorian Poetry in the New Nineteenth-Century Archive*

The new nineteenth-century archive should be understood as encompassing material artifacts, their digital surrogates, and the information generated in preserving, creating, and analyzing them. My work draws on the large scale view of Victorian poetry's cultural field now available in this archive to develop a computational sociological poetics. This talk takes Walter Benjamin's discussion of technological reproducibility as a starting point for thinking about the political possibilities afforded by this archive and by computational analysis. I then turn to examining how poetry is distinguished from prose in its bibliographic materiality, its visual design, and its linguistic style. Examining these three kinds of signifying codes contributes to a new understanding of poetry's production, circulation, and cultural function in the Victorian period.

Helmreich, Anne  
*Late to the Party?: Art History and the Digital Humanities*

While art history is not amongst the disciplines most strongly represented at digital humanities conferences and within edited anthologies and, therefore, can be regarded as “late the party,” the field has, in fact, engaged in pioneering research and public engagement. Why then is it not more centrally positioned within the frame of digital humanities? In this talk, I will provide an overview of recent significant art historical projects that have engaged with digital technologies, including examples of my own work in nineteenth-century studies, and analyze how they have advanced the field. In this context, the challenges and barriers as well as opportunities for art historical work in the digital realm, including open access, will be addressed. I will then turn to the place of art history within the digital humanities to argue for the advantages of greater representation of the questions and concerns of this discipline within the “big tent” of digital humanities.

Peter Capuano  
*Novel Criticism: Computational Research and the Future of the Scholarly Monograph*

The broad focus of this talk addresses the possibilities, pitfalls, and merits of combining computational analysis of literature with traditional (“close reading”) methodologies as these issues pertain to the production of future scholarly monographs. With access to a growing database of digitized material from the nineteenth century, I and many others have begun to wonder about the extent to which the kinds of evidence literary scholars have traditionally marshaled to support book-length arguments are still valid or methodologically sound in the relatively new age of large corpus data extraction. I will offer my own work as a kind of case study for such an inquiry. This will involve a discussion of how the idea for my first book, *Changing Hands*, grew and developed during a transitional period when computational analysis was becoming simultaneously better known and (in some powerful circles) more contested. I will then discuss several stages of my work on a current book project called *Novel Bodies*, which is heavily invested in computational analysis—particularly using the open-source programming language R to investigate what the use of bodily idioms (“shoulder to the wheel,” “nose to the grindstone,” “bundle of nerves,” etc.) by novelists can tell us about the social contexts from which they emerge.

Felluga, Dino  
*The Eventuality of the Digital*

This talk will begin with an overview of my past online projects, illustrating the ways that past scholarly digital projects have tended to accommodate the new medium to a codex way of thinking about knowledge production. The talk will finish, however, by imagining a different future that is more true to the full implications of the digital humanities and that opens up new possibilities for approaching our cultural heritage. The talk thus seeks to serve as an “event” in the sense understood by Alain Badiou: working together, in a way that breaks with the current order of knowledge production, towards a shared vision of untrammeled scholarly and public access to our cultural heritage. Discussing a digital project that does not yet exist, The COVE or The Central Online Victorian Educator, the talk finishes by imagining the possibilities for such a project and calls on scholars to join in the creation of this online, collective venture.