

Digital Humanities Colloquium

Friday 8th July 2011

Abstracts

9:30 Welcome CMR11

Professor Alan Bassindale, Interim PVC Research and Enterprise

Chair: John Wolffe

9:40 Keynote CMR 11

Professor John Corrigan, Florida State University

Digital Technologies and the Spatial Humanities

After surveying some salient features of the emergent digital humanities, this paper will address: (1) the problems and prospects of adapting to the humanities a technology born under the canopy of a scientific epistemology; (2) the necessity for researchers to seek to bend technology to the interests and methods of the humanities; (3) the difficulties of representing in prose the findings of digital mining of massive corpora; (4) the potential of spatial thinking and spatial technologies, when used in conjunction with large-scale data mining, to structure visual displays of patterns in mined data and to advance interpretation of that data; (5) the promise of multimedia display, and (6) how digital technologies encourage interdisciplinary investigation and challenge paradigms of interpretation in the humanities.

Coffee 10:40 – 11:00 CMR Break-out area

11:00 Strand 1 User perspective CMR15

Chair: Jude Fransman

Liam Cooper, Compass Journals, Blackwells

Putting Users at the Heart of Online Publishing

New technologies afford modern scholars tremendous opportunities to enhance their teaching and research. Yet the demands and processes of scholarship have not changed fundamentally in years: peer review, journal articles and book chapters remain the 'currency' of academic life. So what has changed as a result of new technology, and what remains the same?

The core of this presentation will be a selection of illustrative examples, showing the ways in which the Compass Journals have tried to harness the new possibilities afforded by the online medium, in order to increase user engagement with our journal content. I will talk about the user needs we were attempting to meet, what worked, what didn't work so well, and the challenges we faced. I'll also share some

observations and general principles gleaned from 5 years working for a series of future-facing online journals.

Overall, I hope to show how any genuinely innovative publishing organisation needs to make their users' experience a core focus.

Robert Farrow (IET)

Can Technology 'Democratise' Academia?

The proliferation of communication technologies is profoundly changing the nature of academic practice. In this presentation I describe the impact of blogging and social networking tools on the practice and dissemination of academic research across disciplinary boundaries. I suggest that the traditional notion of the university is giving way to communities of scholars who are not tied to particular institutions, and less dependent on traditional forms of dissemination and publication. The resulting 'democratisation' of academia is portrayed in terms of a tension between democracy and expert knowledge mediated by technology.

One prominent contemporary challenge for technologists is to understand the ongoing impact of technological change on academic communities. At The Open University, the Digital Scholarship research team is mapping the use of Twitter in order to better understand user engagement with these technologies. I will present headline findings from this research and discuss the implications for scholarly practice at the OU.

Koula Charitonos, Institute of Educational Technology

Museum Learning 2.0: Reflections on the use of social media among young people at the Museum of London

New technologies and online services have changed the web radically in the past few years. As a result, our society has witnessed a shift to the means that were traditionally employed for communication and learning. This development brings unique and fundamental opportunities, alongside challenges, for rethinking learning and education in both formal and non-formal learning spaces, like museums.

The presentation will explore the use of social media during a school visit to the Museum of London. The research project was designed around the theme 'Get Up, Stand Up for your Rights', which is related to the Key Stage 3 Scheme of Work 'Equality and Beliefs' and involved classroom-based activities and a visit to the museum. This presentation will reflect on use of new technologies (iPhones and Twitter) by young people during the visit and discuss whether the use of such tools helps the young people to engage meaningfully with the museum content. It will also discuss whether the social interaction among them was facilitated and whether this led to an enhanced museum learning experience. Overall, the presentation will outline this research in progress and explore the role of social media in museum learning by drawing on initial findings of this study.

11:00 Strand 2: Humanities Perspective CMR 11

Chair: Elton Barker

Ahuvia Kahane, Royal Holloway University of London

Digital Philology? Traditional Method, Technological Progress, and the Chicago Homer

This talk considers aspects of the relation between digital analysis of texts and philology, the oldest and most traditional disciplinary practice in classical studies and in the humanities in general.

The presentation briefly introduces the Chicago Homer (www.digital.library.northwestern.edu/homer), an online utility for the analysis of Homeric poetry and formulaic language, and comments on some of the Chicago Homer's methods and objectives in relation to philology, looking at the pointed issue of 'speed': Philology, whose roots go back to 2nd and 3rd century Alexandrian scholarship, has been defined (by the great Prague Circle linguist Roman Jakobson) as "the art of reading slowly". The Chicago Homer, like all digital utilities, allows us to process large amounts of data very rapidly, at unprecedented speed.

What, then, happens to the text, when 'slow' meets 'fast'?

One of the recurring (past) narratives of Modernity has been based on the idea of 'progress'. This idea, which has its roots in Hegel and earlier thought, has been debated and heavily criticized especially since the 1970s in 'late modernity'. The question of progress is, of course, also deeply embedded in debates, perceptions and practices surrounding technology, not least in the humanities. Using the Chicago Homer as a case study, this presentation explores a few empirical and abstract aspects of innovation and methodological progress, which can have far-reaching implications for our understanding of humanities research today.

Daniel Allington, Centre for Language and Communication, FELS

Funded research: help or hindrance for the (digital) humanities?

We work in a context within which the de facto purpose of research is increasingly understood to be the acquisition of external funding for the researcher's employing institution. In such a context, digital technology is of immense help to the humanities in that its native cost, infrastructure requirements, and demand for skilled support staff have enabled researchers working within humanities faculties to devise projects that are far more resource-intensive than traditional humanist scholarship could ever hope to be. At the same time, however, it should be admitted that dependence on external funding represents a retreat from scholarly autonomy (a point whose significance is underscored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's incorporation of a party political slogan, 'the Big Society', into its priorities for research sponsorship). In this presentation, I shall consider an alternative path: a scholarship of the digital which aims to resist the imperative to acquire funds, in part through exploiting the potential of digital technology to facilitate research on a shoestring.

Chris Bissell, Department of Communication and Systems, MCT

Reality and authenticity

Archaeologists now use tools such as Google Earth to examine features hitherto unexplored. In the field, however, there is a conflict between traditional practices and the use of ICT. Musicologists now have access to huge data bases of historical documents, but still feel the need to see the manuscripts. The web and CAL have brought the digital world into language teaching and research, but questions multiply concerning authenticity and reliability. This brief paper will use such examples to stimulate debate on reality and authenticity in the digital humanities.

Jan Parker, IET

Digital Scholarship and 'the Humanities Project': Saviour or Threat?

The Digital Humanist strand at January's MLA conference disputed some 'big questions':

*About the place, processes, channels of dissemination, disciplinary and institutional structures and boundaries of 'Digital Scholarship' - production house or break-out suite?

*About the transformative power of digitization and its potential to change research processes and identity:

i) Not a research aide - a 'vast library of tools from which to build specific portals' - but a new Humanities field?

ii) Not a "digital facelift" but 'a complete change to what it means to be a humanities scholar'?

iii) Utopian? (The limited googling of Oxford's 'Electronic Enlightenment' and Tufts/Harvard's Perseus v Alan Liu's discipline-changing 'Transliterations')

*What is/are/will be Digital Humanities anyway? A Digital Humanist? How should we shape and communicate ourselves and our projects?

"Nowadays, Digital Humanities can mean anything... data mining, editing, anarchic blogging, while inviting code junkies, digital artists and edupunks under its capacious canvas."

Quote, from the MLA DH 'Big Tent' forum; to be continued!

11:00 Strand 3 Technology Perspective The Hub Suite

Chair: Linda Wilks

Louise Edwards, The European Library, The Hague

The European digital humanities landscape

This presentation will provide an overview of the European digital humanities landscape, with a focus on Europeana. Europeana is a flagship project of the European Commission that brings together the digital resources of libraries, archives and museums and audio-visual collections. One of its core areas of focus is resources and services to support humanities research. These resources must be interoperable with the tools and services that can be accessed via the developing e-infrastructures in Europe.

Dan Weinbren, The History of the Open University Project, Arts

Watch and learn: the digitalisation of the BBC's OU 1971-2006 course materials.

The Access to Video Assets digitalisation project has enabled OU staff, through Videofinder, <http://videofinder.open.ac.uk/>, to access selected OU analogue television programmes made between 1971 and 2006. Pedagogic material designed to be viewed only once or twice by each student, with broadcasts contextualised by correspondence materials and tutorials, can now be recontextualised and subject to considerable scrutiny through repeated playing and the pause and screen grab facilities. Marginalised by a teleology focused on online collaboration which positioned television viewers as passive, the material can be subjected to active interrogation and quantification by viewers. There can be assessment of the extent to which abstract ideas and non-televisual humanities concepts were trivialised and how far the programmes, by widening access to higher educational materials and to appropriate data processing tools, might have bolstered the confidence of those on the brink of imagining themselves capable of engagement with higher and continuing education.

Caroline Tagg, Centre for Language and Communication, FELS

Linguistic corpora: help or hindrance for understanding language use?

Linguistic corpora – large digitally-stored databases of texts – have had a major impact in fields including lexicography, translation, literature studies, and sociolinguistics. Corpora reveal frequency information and language patterning not accessible through ‘native-speaker’ intuition, and are therefore often associated with objectivity and the value of attested data over introspection. However, one issue is that, by focusing on frequently-occurring patterns, corpora encourage linguists to prioritise the mundane over what may be creative, salient, and thus relevant for speakers. Secondly, what linguistic corpora tell us about language is not objective but shaped by the technology and by what we ask the technology to do. For example, technological advances have led to the constant refining of corpus-based linguistic descriptions.

My talk is illustrated by various examples suggesting that although language corpora have helped linguistic study, they need to be used wisely if they are not to hinder a deep understanding of language use.

Chris High, MCT

Participatory digital technologies

The increasing range in available digital technologies and the spread in access to them has opened new spaces for participatory scholarship. The potential in these spaces suggests a focus not just on the information and data, but also on patterns of relationships and the negotiation of meaning in social contexts. This presentation will consider the use of participatory technologies in applied research, focussing on participatory video and its use in social learning in particular. The affordances of different technologies and the issue of authorship in film-making reveal much about the textured nature of participation and the intersection of interests it can give rise to.

Lunch 12:30 – 13:30 Hub Suite

13:30 Strand 1: User Perspective CMR11

Chair: Paul Lawrence

Katharina Rebay-Salisbury & Yi Hong

Computer science versus archaeology? A dialogue

The development of digital technologies in the humanities broadly construed will be substantially enabled through interdisciplinary collaboration between computing experts and scholars in the humanities from a range of different backgrounds. The Tracing Networks programme (www.tracingnetworks.ac.uk) is applying innovative digital data management technology to help solving questions of connectivity and relatedness in the Ancient Mediterranean and beyond. Using an ontology based system for our basic archaeological data has been a learning process so far: combined expertise from computer science and archaeology has smoothed some traditional database problems, but has highlighted other issues. Diversity of working languages, working with incomplete data and queering what was not coded for may soon be problems of the past, and innovative ways of tagging, analyzing and displaying data lead to instant results. What computer scientists found most difficult to work with is the archaeologists' reluctance to use a well defined, universally accepted terminology. Philosophical embracing of vagueness, plural interpretations and multiple meanings are hard to deal with in a digital world. Other problems include copyright issues and ownership of data. In this dialogue, we will report of the most rewarding as well as most frustrating moments in trying to understand each other's discipline whilst working towards a common goal. We will outline different ways of describing knowledge in our disciplines and different ways of reasoning from facts by logic processes.

Matheiu D'Aquin, KMi

Humanities research with the web of data

Data is becoming more and more of a commodity, made available, shared and reused on the Web, across many scenarios and domains. This new environment has the potential to fundamentally transform the practices of research, especially in humanities, where the questions and studies could relate to a variety of contexts - historical, cultural, economical, etc. In this presentation, I will discuss how novel approaches to data management, relating to technological developments in the areas of the Web of Data, linked data and the Semantic Web, can be exploited to create more flexible ways of investigating available resources for research. Based on concrete examples, I will show how linking core research data to resources available on the Web can bring more flexible and unexpected views onto the data, making emerge new relations and patterns, as well a generating new research questions connecting previously isolated contexts and areas.

Trish Cashen, Project Officer for New Technologies, Arts

Mind the gap: bridging digital cultures

In the early 90s I first became involved with what was called humanities computing, computing in the service of humanities. Now digital culture has become pervasive to the extent that all scholarship involves the use digital resources, to communicate, collaborate, publish, or to generate new research. This calls into question the distinction between digital and traditional scholarship, which can now be considered to be one of degree rather than kind.

We need to develop approaches to digital humanities which embrace wider digital culture to open up new possibilities. A key aspect is to rethink the nature of collaboration in order to unlock the full creative potential of a team with a wide spectrum of knowledge. Further, by engaging in broader dialogue to examine critically what we mean by audience, creator, user, resource, and control, we can enable scholars to move from being consumers of material to active critics, from commentators to creators.

13:30 Strand 3: Technology Perspective CMR15

Chair: Robin Goodfellow

Theodore Scaltsas, Ancient Philosophy, University of Edinburgh

Digitising ideas

How does one use computers to expedite the presentation and the comprehension of arguments? I will describe various ways we have tried out in Archelogos Projects to do just that. I will further point to the current tendencies in the handling of ideas by friendly software.

Laura Hamer, Music, Faculty of Arts

The application of digital technology to music criticism research: outlining a new methodology

The British Music Criticism since 1945 Project (jointly hosted by Birmingham Conservatoire and the Open University) seeks to harness the potential of digital newspaper archives to investigate the evolving trends of British music criticism since the Second World War. The use of digital archives by this project highlights the changing nature of humanities research which digital technology enables. This paper will outline one way in which digital technology is changing the process of humanities research by summarising the blended methodology which has been developed to examine the changing trends in critical writing since 1945. In the first phase of the project, a corpus of music criticism was collected from *The Times Digital Archive* and metadata collated from the articles imputed into a database. Quantitative textual analysis methods, drawn from computational linguistics, were applied to the data to examine changes in critical writing, performing repertoires, and audience reception. This blended approach, enabled through the development of digital and information technology, allows changing trends discernible from qualitative textual analysis alone to be supported by statistical data; an exciting new departure within musicology.

Allan Jones, Dept of Communication and Systems, MCT

A world in bits

Digital technology offers powerful tools for research and teaching in humanities. Such tools are now used in Open University teaching. In modules offered in the MCT faculty, for example, students can manipulate visual representations of images, or use audio editing equipment to compare a chord tuned in 'pure' intonation with one tuned in equal temperament. Many other examples could be cited.

The humanities, though, unlike the sciences, are less concerned with problem-solving than with evaluation, and this, I suggest, bears strongly on current anxieties regarding digital technology in the humanities. For instance, is an increased use of digital tools in the humanities likely to lead to an elevation of sheer quantification over painstaking analysis? At a more theoretical level, does digital technology bring with it values that are inherently inimical to those of the humanities. Is it tainted by the market-governed, instrumentalist world from which it springs, or is it value-free? My presentation offers some thoughts on these themes, and draws on recent work by historians and sociologists of technology.

14:40 – 15:00 Tea CMR Break-out area

15:00 Keynote CMR 11

Chair: John Wolffe

Professor Lorna Hardwick, Classical Studies, The Open University

Shifts in the making? An observer's perspective

This short talk reflects on the expectations and questions that I brought to the conference and on the extent to which these have been clarified and augmented by the discussions. In particular, I will look at the spaces staked out in the strands Users/Humanities/Technologies and comment on whether there seems to be evidence of shared ground, commonalities of concern and approach and clear pointers for future action. I will also look at 'spaces in between', yet to be peopled and activated. Can we see a clear development over the centuries from oral to print to digital in the humanities, with associated shifts in the norms of creation, transmission, participation, deliberation and transformation as well as in the power relations involved in education, access and protocols of preservation? Or is the situation more fuzzy, demanding different theoretical bases as well as practices? What, for example, might be a digital equivalent of reader response theory? How valid in digital terms is the distinction between teaching and research?

To lead into the closing discussion I will then make some suggestions about the role that the OU might take, both as enabler and as gadfly.

16:00 Close