Digital Humanities Module

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Research Methodology in
European Modern
Languages and
Literatures

Session 19

This session will be entirely focused on discussing the sections from Burdick *et al.* (2012):

1. Digital Humanities Fundamentals
2. The Project as Basic Unit
3. Institutions and Pragmatics
    a. How to Evaluate Digital Scholarship
    b. Project-based Scholarship
    c. Core Competencies In Processes and Methods
    d. Learning Outcomes for the Digital Humanities
    e. Creating Advocacy

TEXT: Anne Burdick, Johanna Drucker, Peter Lunenfeld, Todd Presner and Jeffrey Schnapp. "A Short Guide to the Digital Humanities," *Digital_Humanities*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012. pp. 121-135. [PDF available on GLOCAL]

The opportunities include redrawing the boundary lines among the humanities, the social sciences, the arts, and the natural sciences; expanding the audience and social impact of scholarship in the humanities; developing new forms of inquiry and knowledge production and reinvigorating ones that have fallen by the wayside; training future generations of humanists through hands-on, project-based learning as a complement to classroom-based learning; and developing practices that expand the scope, enhance the quality, and increase the visibility of humanistic research. (Burdik *et al.*: 122)

The challenges include addressing fundamental questions such as: How can skills traditionally used in the humanities be reshaped in multimedia terms? How and by whom will the contours of cultural and historical memory be defined in the digital era? How might practices such as digital storytelling coincide with or diverge from oral or print-based storytelling? What is the place of *humanitas* in a networked world? (Burdik *et al.*: 122)

Whereas the initial waves of computational humanities concentrated on everything from word frequency studies and textual analysis (classification systems, mark-up, encoding) to hypertext editing and textual database construction, contemporary Digital Humanities marks a move beyond a privileging of the textual, emphasizing graphical methods of knowledge production and organization, design as an integral component of research, transmedia crisscrossings, and an expanded concept of the sensorium of humanistic knowledge. It is also characterized by an intensified focus on the building of transferrable tools, environments, and platforms for collaborative scholarly work and by an emphasis upon curation as a defining feature of scholarly practice. (Burdik et al.: 122)

A project is a kind of scholarship that requires design, management, negotiation, and collaboration. It is also scholarship that projects, in the sense of futurity, as something which is not yet. Projects are often pursued in teams, with collaborators bringing complementary skill-sets and interests to conceptualize the research questions being investigated and design possible trajectories for them to be answered. Hence, projects are projective, involving iterative processes and many dimensions of coordination, experimentation, and production. (Burdik *et al.*: 124)

Like traditional humanities-based research and teaching, Digital Humanities work involves practices of analysis, critique, and interpretation; editing and annotation; historical research and contextualization. It examines the formal and historical properties of works of the imagination, the interplay of self and society, the history of ideas and of material culture. It attends to qualitative and non-quantifiable features of the human experience: complexity, ambiguity, medium specificity, and subjectivity. It builds on traditional approaches to the study, preservation, and classification of cultural corpora.

(Burdik *et al.*: 124)

Since antiquity, the dominant models of humanistic inquiry have favored an understanding of intellectual labor as solitary and contemplative, cut off from—and even superior to—manual labor and the realm of making or doing. Digital Humanities re-embeds these models in an augmented model of pedagogy that emphasizes learning through making and doing, whether on the level of the individual or the group. (Burdik *et al.*: 125)

Digital Humanities is engaged in developing print-plus and post-print models of knowledge. Both involve more than an updating of the knowledge delivery system. They entail the cognitive and epistemological reshaping of humanistic fields as a function of the affordances provided by the digital with respect to print. They also respect the increasing role teamwork and collaboration play in humanities research and training. (Burdik *et al.*: 125)

The digital print-plus era, in contrast, allows for toggling back and forth between multiple views of the same materials. It allows for fluid scale shifts, for "zooming" from the macro- to the micro-level, and for the interweaving of data sets (such as source materials, notes, and correspondence) into research outputs. The screens and augmented spaces of the print-plus era allow for the faceting, filtering, and versioning of corpora; for the coexistence of multiple pathways within a single repository; for multilinear forms of argument. (Burdik *et al.*: 125)

Benefits include cost-sharing and enhanced prospects for external funding. But they also transcend the practical sphere: They enable Big Humanities models of research whose outcomes are of potential interest to broad cross-disciplinary and nonspecialist audiences. By involving multiple institutions, such projects contribute to a sense of shared identity and of belonging to a broader research community. They also help to answer endemic student anxieties regarding the practical value of humanities knowledge and research. (Burdik *et al.*: 126)

The promotion of public knowledge is a core value of the Digital Humanities. Extramural partnerships—whether with professional societies, historical associations, institutions of informal learning (libraries, museums, archives), corporations, or public entities—can extend the reach and impact of humanities research in contemporary society. The most successful partnerships address questions of shared critical interest with research results that rise to the highest standards of scholarly rigor while being conjugated across multiple media platforms in the "language" of the partner institutions through exhibitions, performances, books, Web publications, or other means. (Burdik *et al.*: 126)

Last but not least, institutions of higher learning must promote and foster a less risk-averse culture in the humanities disciplines: a culture where, as in the sciences, "failure" would be accepted as a productive outcome when undertaking innovative, speculative work. Differentiating between productive forms of failure and poor research is essential to promoting research communities where innovation is a core value. (Burdik *et al.*: 127)

Traditional print-based metrics of productivity are already being eclipsed by the realities of print-plus and digital publishing, so expectations of productivity must encompass multiple media, different formats, and variable scales of contributions to knowledge. In other words, the media and technologies in which intellectual work is realized matter as much as its "content." This means that the "work" is not just the content but, rather, everything: the environment that has been designed for the work's performance and publication; the interface and data structures, the back-end database, and the code that enables multiple forms of audience engagement. All of these matter in assessments of quality and rigor. (Burdik *et al.*: 127)

Project-based scholarship exemplifies contemporary Digital Humanities principles. It differs from traditional scholarly publication in being team-based, distributed in its production and outcome, dependent on networked resources (technical and/or administrative), and in being iterative and ongoing, rather than fixed or final, in its outcome. It necessarily involves many dimensions of conception, design, coordination, and resource use that build extra layers of complexity onto the traditional approach to humanities research. (Burdik *et al.*: 130)