IPLAI Reading Group 2011-2012
Defining Digital Humanities
Convener: Matthew Milner (matthew.milner@mcgill.ca)
Tuesdays at 4pm in the IPLAI seminar room at 3610 McTavish

Digital Humanities is currently undergoing a reconfiguration at McGill. The Digital Humanities Initiative is bringing together digital humanists from across a number of faculties for the first time. Yet it is not clear what Digital Humanities actual are: this central problem arises from the vast potential the digital age presents for humanities scholarship. Key to the dilemma is whether Digital Humanities itself is something distinct from analog humanities, or whether it is merely the reconfiguration of humanities itself using digital technologies and media. At the same time, for many Digital Humanities also offers important opportunities for reconsidering the place of the humanities within society itself. Not only are digital technologies, media, and social models reconfiguring public life, they are also offering new avenues for intellectual engagement and the ways in which humanistic studies as well as artistic creation enters into, and becomes active in, the public realm. Moving forward with Digital Humanities at McGill requires rigorous consideration of the potentials presented by digitization, and the problems presented by the inability to satisfactorily define or categorize what it is the Digital Humanities does or seeks to do – and the implications of both. And so, this lack of definition is our overarching heuristic.

Over the course of eight sessions we will examine the current state of Digital Humanities through the eyes of prominent scholars, review exemplary Digital Humanities work and institutional policies, and wrestle with how Digital Humanities is reconfiguring what it is humanities inquiry might be or do. The problem of definition bookends our program: the first session surveys the Digital Humanities landscape, while our final session will come full circle to consider whether Digital Humanities is distinct from normative academic change. The six intervening sessions are divided between reviewing the various ways of ‘doing’ Digital Humanities and institutional responses, and critical discussions of the intellectual and political challenges presented by the digital revolution.

Readings
Our core readings derive from a broad range of sources: articles and blog posts, and excerpts from monographs, institutional reports, as well as online commentary, several youtube and vimeo videos, and a card game. The readings themselves will be made available online via McGill’s soon-to-be unveiled Centrestage internal content management infrastructure. They will form the nucleus of a much larger online annotated bibliography on Digital Humanities from which our participants can draw supplementary readings at their leisure.

4Humanities
The faculty nucleus of the reading group itself will also form the McGill node for the new 4Humanities Initiative based out of the University of California-Santa Barbara and sponsored by the University of Alberta. This new network of digital humanists seeks to leverage the advent of digital lines of inquiry, technologies, social scholarship, and new media, to assert the place of
the humanities at large in national and international discussions on the human condition. It aims very much to encourage humanists to fulfill their obligations as public intellectuals, and sees digital humanities and its modes of dissemination as instrumental for so doing. As an advocacy group, 4Humanities is not ideologically aligned, but draws its raison d’être from the need to strongly articulate the role humanistic inquiry and study has in our national and international dialogues. The reading group will serve as 4Humanities@McGill’s meeting place and offering to the larger initiative. As part of this, its discussions and program will be blogged for the 4Humanities website at http://humanistica.ualberta.ca/.

Resources
Although we are not focused on monographs, some participants might enjoy reading some of the following alongside the sessions:

Dear, Michael, et al. (eds), GeoHumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place, Routledge 2011

ProfHacker (http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/)
DHAAnswers (http://digitalhumanities.org/answers/)

Preliminaries
Digital Humanities does involve a certain amount of practical application - before the first meeting it will be extremely useful for our discussions if participants were familiar with basic HTML and the history of humanities computing.

Some Web coding...
Google’s HTML, CSS, and Javascript from the Ground Up:  
http://code.google.com/edu/submissions/html-css-javascript/#introduction
What is HTML? http://www.w3schools.com/html/html_intro.asp - “Try it out” feature

Resources

Background Reading
Term 1

1. Where and What?: Current State and Definitions of Digital Humanities
Sept. 20, 4pm
Lead: Matthew Milner

Our first meeting will address the current state of Digital Humanities as a ‘field’ or academic pursuit, and lay out the problem definition that will shape the sessions which follow.

Core
2. How do you define Humanities Computing / Digital Humanities?
[This is a long list; browse at your leisure. Please note two or three.]

Further
Digital Humanities in 2008 (Three parts) (blog)

2. Forms of Digital Humanities: Digitization and Environments
- Case Studies: The Shakespeare Quartos Archive (www.quartos.org) & the Orlando Project (orlando.cambridge.org)
Oct. 18, 4pm
Lead: TBD (with Susan Brown and / or Neil Freistat)

Until the advent of web 2.0 in the past decade, digital humanities had been largely shaped by forms of digitization. Whether encoding texts, creating eArchives, online museums, or research environments, these efforts are aimed at either virtualizing traditional analog sources or are focused on making them presentable within a research and learning context. The connecting threat between the virtualization of sources and their presentation or the creation of digital environments is the realization that they are all digital objects. We cannot separate an encoded text, conceptually, from an encoded environment.

We will explore how encoding, visualization, and online archival work come together by looking at the Shakespeare Quartos Project (www.quartos.org) and the Orlando Project (orlando.cambridge.org) alongside readings on TEI and eArchive creation. We hope to be joined in our discussions via video conferencing by Susan Brown, Director of the Orlando Project, and Neil Freistat, Director of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities and US Co-Director of Quartos.
Core

Case Studies for Discussion:
The Shakespeare Quartos Project (http://www.quartos.org)
The Orlando Project (http://orlando.cambridge.org)

3. New Horizons: Connectivities, Analysis, Simulation and Semantics
Nov. 8, 4pm
Lead: TBD

Web 2.0’s primary dynamic has been to push the networking principles of the web beyond the connection between machines. At first this meant connecting data between disparate digital silos and sources, but with the advent of social networking it has also come to mean connecting users and their online experiences. We’re seeing the fruition of this work in the creation of mashups – collisions of disparate data and users, yet presented in a seamless experience. But there are also more avenues being explored - connecting machines in High Performance Computing is allowing different types of analyses, simulations and gaming are taking advantage of this. Connecting data sources also presents the question of the scale of possible analyses. Perhaps most pervasive for humanities scholarship is the switch from the Syntactic Web to the Semantic Web, and how meaning is becoming something computed.

Our aim in this session is not to focus on one specific aspect of new digital horizons, but to illustrate their immense potential. Given the range of possible examples, we will share a group core reading, but leave participants to choose cases as their interests dictate.

Core

Cases
Virtual Research Environments

Quantitative / Corpus Analysis

TBC
Crowd-Sourcing / Social Scholarship
Hurricane Digital Memory Bank (HDMB) [http://www.hurricanearchive.org](http://www.hurricanearchive.org/)

GIS
*Selection from* Dear, Michael, et al. (eds), *GeoHumanities: Art, History, Text at the Edge of Place*, Routledge 2011 (*TBD - full text unavailable 15/07/2011*)
or

Simulation, Gaming & GRID Computing
Craenen, Bart et al. 'Medieval Military Logistics: A Case for Distributed Agentbased Simulation', *DISIO 2010 - Distributed Simulation & Online gaming*, Torremolinos, Spain, March 15, 2010 [7pp]
Video at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnZK1qlX6UJ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnZK1qlX6UJ)

Semantic Web

Time & Space

New Forms of Publication
*Vectors* [http://vectors.usc.edu/](http://vectors.usc.edu/)

Further

4. Who and How?: Institutional Responses
Nov. 29, 4pm
Lead: TBD

The potential offered by projects discussed in the preceding sessions has drawn the attention of both research agencies and institutions. Term 1 will close by examining how the academy is responding formally in institutional policies and discussions to the practical challenges presented digital pursuits. This topic (as the last in the series on the broad state of
Digital Humanities) will also serve as the foundation for the second term’s engagement with the more conceptual and theoretical challenges posed by digital scholarship.

Core

Further
Gaffield, Chad. ‘Re-Imagining Scholarship in the Digital Age’ Plenary at Congress 2011 http://vimeo.com/21685670 [c.1hr]

Term 2
In the first three sessions of term 2 we will explore the nature of digital artifice and scholarly work, each taking up a particular facet: 5, in hermeneutics of infrastructure; 6, in collective academic and intellectual culture; and 7, in terms of disciplinary identity and definition, and the techne of scholarship.

5. Hermeneutics and Mediation in Virtual Objects and Code
Jan. 17

3pm: Optional Pre-Session Experiment:
For those able and interested, we will meet 1 hour prior before our normal session begins to play Zimmerman’s experimental card game.
Defining Digital Humanities – IPLAI Reading Group

4pm
Lead: TBD

Building on sessions #2 and #3, the first meeting of the winter term will explore the creation of digital objects and environments as acts of interpretation and mediation. More often than not digital humanists have focused on the presentation and analysis of digital content. However, designing both hardware and software are acts of interpretation that influence what the content will be, how it will be experienced, and the ways in which it will be understood. Code mediates between the architecture, infrastructure, and digital content; it is usually invisible, but its writing sees the creation of virtual objects. From the encoding of a text in TEI, to the creation of a class of objects in PHP or Python, to a Youtube video, the digital world is reducible to text that is interpreted and read: content by users; code by cyberinfrastructure. Unlike the binding of a book, the digital humanist is faced with the real task of creating the virtual paper and glue that presents their content. This process of artifice is only just beginning to be appreciated for its hermeneutic implications.

Core

Further

Feb. 7, 4pm
Lead: Devon Wong

In this session, we will be discussing the politics coded into digital architectures in terms of authorship, publication, and dissemination. Questions that we will address may include: Who is the author? How does citation operate? How does “ownership” work? How is work disseminated? Collected? What does it mean to be a public intellectual? What new ways of being a public intellectual are made possible by technology? What does publishing look like, and what will it look like in the future? And how do changes in communication structures effect / affect knowledge structures and practices?

In the background of this discussion, we must keep in mind that the digital architectures we build today are laden with ideology and that “technical” decisions are often also value
judgments. As the academy establishes its presence in the digital world, the ways in which it codes its cyberspaces, policy and design decisions involved in establishing digital book collections, building virtual tools, publishing and distributing works, interfacing with the non-academic public(s), and dealing with corporate entities will be battlegrounds for competing interests and ideologies.

Core

Authorship:


Digital Architectures:


Google and the Future of Libraries:


Open Source and the Commons (or The Legal Relation Between Coding and Other Acts of Writing):

   creativecommons.org/weblog/entry/7774
7. Creative Commons Licenses. Web.: [http://creativecommons.org/licenses/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/) [1p]
   http://www.gnu.org/copyleft/gpl.html

7. Building and Humanistic Fabrication: Tools, Media, and Techne
March 6, 4pm
Lead: TBD

One of the central dilemmas facing Digital Humanities is its place within the broader processes of the Digitization of Humanity. Certain definitions of Digital Humanities see it as an element of Media Studies, while others disagree. Regardless, there is undoubtedly a close affinity between the two areas of scholarship. What happens to notions of Digital Humanities when digital media and techniques are used artistically and creatively, or when the digital becomes ubiquitous?

What is the difference between building a digital tool or writing a digital text? Is the utilitarianism of tool creation distinct in terms of artifice from artistic works which employ digital
media? Can the two be reconciled in construction of creative tools like a haptic interface for Google earth?

Core

New Media

1. Carmody, T. ‘Response: What’s the difference between Digital Humanities and New Media?’ Digital Humanities Questions and Answers, January 2011. [1p]
3. Sorensen, Vibeke, ‘Rewiring Culture, the Brain, and Digital Media’ in Thomas Bartscherer and Roderick Coover, Switching Codes, University of Chicago Press, 2011, 239-246 [6pp]

Fabrication and Building


Videos

Ramsay, Stephen and Geoffrey Rockwell, 'Writing as Programming as Writing' (parts 1 &2)
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQUZipgevC0 [7min]
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O0lK9TNeAWw [7min]

3D Printing Video: RepRapWiki. [8mins]
http://reprap.org/wiki/Main_Page

Further

Hacking as a Way of Knowing (http://niche-canada.org/hackknow)

8. So What?: Humanities 2.0 or The 'Computational Turn'?

April 3, 4pm
Lead: Paul Yachnin

In this our last session we will return to the problems of definition from a theoretical angle and ask whether there is distinction between the humanities and digital humanities. In the
digital age, do the humanities stand to become digital in totality? Consequently we will turn to the nature of academic change and the relationship of the humanities to forms of techne and media.

There have been calls from within the digital humanities community for a more systematic reconfiguration of humanities pursuits on account of the challenges presented by digital media and models. Also, with the 4Humanities group, there has been a call to advocacy for the humanities in general through digital means. Taken together, David Berry is calling digital humanities the ‘Computational Turn’: what do these assertions and our year’s discussion mean for the humanities?

Are the Humanities becoming the Digital Humanities in totality?

Core
2. Liu, Alan ‘Where is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities’, MLA, Los Angeles, January 7, 2011 [3pp]

Further Reading
http://www.thecomputationalturn.com/