

Digital humanities: Critical views and experiences

Programme

Thursday 14 November	
Time	Activity
10.45-11.15	Registration and coffee & tea
11.15-11.45	Welcome and introductions by Sally Wyatt
11.45-12.45	<p>Keynote 1 – What is Digital Humanities Doing in the Library?</p> <p><i>Lorna Hughes, University of Wales Chair in Digital Collections, National Library of Wales</i></p> <p>Chair: Sally Wyatt</p> <p>There are currently many definitions of digital humanities and a variety of opinions about where digital humanities should be institutionally based, largely based on assumptions about how digital content, methods, and tools can support research and its communication across the disciplines. Using the research programme in digital collections at the National Library of Wales as an exemplar, this presentation will explore aspects of a successful model of a digital humanities programme within a Library setting. This will explore the effectiveness of this model as the basis for core aspects of digital humanities: the innovative use of digital content for research; the creation of new digital resources that are based on the needs of scholarship; the development of new collaborations around research, teaching and public engagement; and the exploitation of the opportunities of new national and international infrastructures. The Library is a traditional 'research infrastructure': in the digital age, it is an excellent ecosystem for digital humanities to develop and flourish.</p>
12.45-13.45	Lunch provided
13.45-15.15	<p>Eric Meyer & Ralph Schroeder (Oxford), <i>Digital Humanities or Humanities, Digital?</i></p> <p>Chair: Ray Siemens</p> <p>P Elli Bleeker (Huygens), <i>Towards new guidelines for creating a digital scholarly edition</i></p> <p>Sally Wyatt (eHg & Maastricht) & Loet Leydesdorff (UvA), <i>"E-Humanities" or "Digital Humanities:." Is that the question?</i></p>
15.15-15.45	Coffee & tea
15.45-16.45	<p>Sonja de Leeuw (Utrecht), <i>Exploring online television heritage</i></p> <p>Chair: Wido van Peursen</p> <p>Alexandre Camus & Dominique Vinck (Lausanne), <i>When information sciences meet cultural heritage. Changing tools and contemporary humanities</i></p>
16.45-17.00	Short break

17.00-18.00 Debate between Rens Bod (UvA) & Anja Volk (Utrecht) *Who's afraid of patterns? The particular vs. the universal. The implicit vs. the explicit.*

Chair: Sally Wyatt

Rens Bod: Who's afraid of patterns? The particular vs. the universal.

When humanities researchers talk about patterns, they usually stress that the notion of pattern should in no way be confused with *universal* pattern. Universal patterns may be the main business of the sciences (mathematical, dominated by universal laws) but not of the humanities (allegedly concerned with unique events and hermeneutic methods). But does this stance also correspond to actual research practice?

In the field of digital humanities, the search for patterns in the humanistic material (music, languages, literature, theater, paintings) is ubiquitous, and so is the search for *universal* patterns. Universal patterns are sought and found in literary production (e.g. the assumed universal pattern of reusing specific syntactic fragments by literary authors), in musicology (e.g. the structural, hierarchical patterns into which melodies can be segmented) and of course in linguistics (patterns of word order universals in large language databases). Even in history, the search for universal patterns has been carried out, e.g. by the *Annales* historians and social historians who diachronically research into revolutions, revolts, strikes, migration and trade.

So the search for (universal) patterns is not just a practice in digital humanities but part and parcel of all humanities disciplines, so it seems. Why then is there such a fuss about the notion of universal pattern? Does this still have to do with the hallowed opposition between the sciences and the humanities?

In this debate we will go into the following questions: (1) can the digital humanities overcome the dichotomy between the sciences and the humanities?, (2) is pattern-seeking really at the heart of digital humanistic inquiry?, and (3) does pattern-seeking in the digital humanities indeed involve both the particular and the universal?

Anja Volk: Who's afraid of patterns? The implicit vs. the explicit.

Humanities researchers have long investigated patterns in many different research contexts. When computation entered the stage of academic research, one of the main emerging hopes was that the computer will help finding patterns in huge amounts of humanistic materials that are difficult to overlook manually by a researcher.

Investigating patterns in digital humanities requires automatic methods of describing and extracting patterns from the humanistic material by the computer. This presupposes the processing of the material through computational models using explicit formalization of knowledge on 'what constitutes a pattern'. Often the amount of explicitness required for computational modeling is greater than what is known about patterns from the more implicit concepts of pattern within the humanities.

For instance, existing repeated pattern finding algorithms in music generally suffer from the problem of combinatorial explosion: they find many more patterns than what humans would describe as 'important' patterns in musical pieces. This raises the question as to what we really know about how humans and humanities researchers filter out those patterns that they consider as 'meaningful' or 'important'. A manual analysis of one piece of music might not need an explicit formalization of 'what constitutes an important pattern' by the researcher

within humanities research; however the processing of thousands of pieces within digital humanities does require this.

I will discuss how this dichotomy between implicit vs. explicit knowledge on patterns we face in digital humanities is both a challenge and a chance. To discuss the consequences from this dichotomy for digital humanities, I will go into the following questions: (1) Have humanities and digital humanities researchers the same goals in investigating patterns? (2) How can implicit knowledge on patterns from humanities and explicit formalization through computational models be integrated into productive research on patterns within digital humanities?, and (3) What do we expect to learn from pattern research within digital humanities on the humanistic material we are investigating?

18.00-19.00	Drinks – at library
19.30--	Dinner – for speakers

Friday 15 November	
9.00-11.00 Chair: Eric Meyer	<p>Max Kemman et al (Erasmus), <i>Google and the Digital Humanities. This is not the one-stop shop you're looking for.</i></p> <p>Wolfgang Kaltenbrunner (Leiden), <i>Transparency Strategies in Digital Scholarship</i></p> <p>Vasileios Routsis (University College London), <i>The revamped online self-disclosure ethics and the inception of crowd-sourced sousveillance</i></p>
11.00-11.30	Coffee & tea
11.30-13.00 Chair: Lorna Hughes	<p>Wido van Peursen (VU University), <i>From Question to Query</i></p> <p>Serge ter Braake et al (VU University), <i>Provenance and Biographical data</i></p> <p>Jasmijn van Gorp et al (Utrecht), <i>Building Bridges: the Production of Inter-Disciplinary Knowledge in an Audiovisual Archive Project</i></p>
13.00-13.45	Lunch provided
13.45-14.45	<p>Keynote 2 – Framing a Response to (Inter)Disciplinary Change in the Digital Humanities</p> <p><i>Ray Siemens, University of Victoria, Canada</i></p> <p>Chair: Andrea Scharnhorst Discussant: Fernie Maas (VU)</p> <p>In the context of trends that are influencing changes in the Humanities and beyond, this talk considers recent developments in the Digital Humanities with the aim of suggesting elements of their positive engagement. Considered in this engagement are: the important (and profitably-elusive) process of defining 'Digital Humanities'; the notions of the methodological commons and communities of practice; curricular responses to computational engagement in the arts and humanities; and the value of an open approach to current and future work on modeling humanistic data and process, in ways that embrace the communities served by the Humanities.</p>
14.45-15.00	Close and next steps