

Implicit Assumptions, Methodology, and the Digital Humanities

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SMATHERS LIBRARY (formerly Library East) 1st Floor Conference Room

Digital Humanities Working Group brown-bag discussion

Description:

Personally, I think Digital Humanities is about building things. [...] If you are not making anything, you are not ... a digital humanist. --Stephen Ramsey

For some time now, scholars from inside and outside “the digital humanities club” have been trying to distinguish what makes the digital humanities distinct from the traditional humanities. One prominent argument, implied in Stephen Ramsey’s quote above, is that while traditional humanists are concerned with reading/criticism, digital humanists are concerned with building and making. After all, “if you aren’t building,” Ramsey argues, “you are not engaged in the ‘methodologization’ of the humanities.”

In this brown bag session, I want to interrogate the assumptions underlying such claims about methodology in relation to the digital humanities and the humanities in general. If we accept “building” as a methodological imperative for the digital humanities, what exactly should digital humanists be making? For Ramsey and many others, building and making in the digital humanities means crafting digital born products (as Terry Harpold has also recently noted on the DH Working Group Listserv). Such products typically afford new means to collect, store, organize, analyze, and present data as well as publish research findings. But what else are digital humanists in the business of making? What ought digital humanists be in the business of making considering the economic, political, and environmental climate we currently find ourselves working in? And perhaps, more importantly, what exactly is at stake for humanities scholars in moving from reading to making as a “new kind of hermeneutic”?

To get at these questions and to complicate governing methodological assumptions about “building” in the digital humanities, I will draw on my own experience creating both methodology and digital research methods for rhetorical and visual studies. Rather than forward a specific argument, I intend to forward a series of questions in hopes that the majority of our brown bag session will be spent in productive conversation.

Bio: Laurie E. Gries is Assistant Professor in the Department of English

Digital Humanities @ UF: <http://www.humanities.ufl.edu/digitalhum.html>