Dan Cohen's Digital Humanities Blog » Blog Archive » Digital Humanities And The Disciplines, Day 1

Aside from a talk from yours truly on new directions in digital history, the first day of the "Digital Humanities and the Disciplines[1]" conference at Rutgers featured a talk by Hilary Ballon[2] entitled "Rethinking the Journal in Multimedia." Ballon is the Associate Vice Chancellor at New York University[3] and the editor of the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians[4].

She spoke about the complexities of prototyping a new media version of the JSAH. If any field in the humanities could benefit from moving from paper to the web, it is architectural history. The SAH has always been restrained by paper: color images were too expensive for the journal, not to mention the possibilities of dynamic media like video or 3D models. So for the JSAH, the move online will be liberating and possibly even transformative.

The prototype Ballon showed us has an embedded media viewer and a sidebar with all images and architectural plans referenced in the article, so you can jump back and forth from the narrative to the visual evidence. Unlike images in the paper journal, you can also pan and zoom to closely examine the evidence. The prototype also permits linking to external software such as Google Earth (for situating buildings in space).

Beyond the prototype, Ballon made several interesting points about the way in which new media might change the practice of architectural history. She noted that the rise of the slide projector in the early twentieth century not only changed pedagogy in her field, but also led to the centrality of certain formats—specifically, the side-by-side comparison. The 3D models she showed in the JSAH prototype suggest that architectural historians can now do more with *the visitor's experience of a building* versus the prior overriding interest in *the architect's vision for the building*. (Note here the parallel with the discussion in literary studies about the balance of power between the author and reader.)

Moreover, new media might allow the JSAH to cover and review forms of scholarship beyond the monograph and article. For example, exhibitions by architectural historians are often overlooked even though they are serious scholarly work. JSAH does currently review exhibitions, but not that many and these reviews are often published after the exhibition has closed because of the long time lag in paper publication. The JSAH hopes that web publication will narrow this gap while also allowing new media recreations of the exhibitions so others can witness them.

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References

1. ^ Digital Humanities and the Disciplines (cca.rutgers.edu)
2. ^ Hilary Ballon (www.columbia.edu)
3. ^ New York University (www.nyu.edu)
4. ^ Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians (www.sah.org)
5. ^ View all posts in Conferences and Workshops (www.dancohen.org)
6. ^ View all posts in Scholarly Communication (www.dancohen.org)
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