Building the Digital City: New Media Theory Meets Digital Humanities Practice

15-20 minute paper

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Biography

Victoria Szabo is an Assistant Research Professor of Visual Studies and New Media in the Department of Art, Art History & Visual Studies (AAHVS) at Duke University. She is also the Program Director for Information Science + Information Studies (ISIS), and the co-Director of the Franklin Humanities Institute's GreaterThanGames Lab, as well as a member of the Steering Committee for the Wired! Lab for Digital Historical Visualization, and an affiliate of the FHI Haiti and Border/Works Labs.

Abstract

At Duke University we have been exploring the "lab" model for humanities scholarship using a variety of organizing principles. I play a leadership role in two labs participating in different aspects of "digital city"-based projects. This presentation will describe how two different "takes" on the lab model contribute to new forms of interdisciplinary knowledge-production and communication around the topic of "digital cities," in the process reflecting on the relationship of the digital humanities to new media studies as they play out in collaborative, project-based work, and how they might productively relate as multimodal scholarship becomes more commonplace in various humanities and interpretive social science disciplines.

The Wired! Lab for digital historical visualization focuses on art, architecture, and urban history, and how visualization technologies help us understand our traditional objects of historical and aesthetic inquiry in new ways. The GreaterThanGames Lab, on the other hand, is focused on transmedia applications, virtual worlds, and digital storytelling as themselves new forms of authorship and expression. While both labs are interdisciplinary, and combine theory and practice in the execution of the research and teaching programs, each has a different objective. Wired! is about method in the service of scholarly questions about historical materials; GreaterThanGames is about the medium itself, as well as theoretically infused platform development. Introducing these forms of research and representation brings in whole new sets of assumptions about what constitutes data, argument, narrative, and evidence to support not only one line of inquiry undertaken by an individual or group of scholars in the moment – but also future, emergent questions "we" have not yet learned to ask.

This talk will describe a theory of historical and cultural visualization of urban environments as it has been instantiated in our various digital modeling and mapping projects in Durham and Venice, our CityExplorer mobile app prototype as a site of cyberobject consumption – and perhaps, in the future, production – and how

we imagine a collaborative, group-sourced digital city net could provide an avenue for interdisciplinary collaboration not only between cognate humanities fields such as art, literature, and history, but also as a case study for instantiating new media theory in so-called digital humanities practice.

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