

AHRC ICT Methods Network Workshop

TECHNICAL INNOVATION IN ART HISTORICAL RESEARCH: OPPORTUNITIES & PROBLEMS

Monday, 20th November 2006, 2 p.m. - 5.30 p.m.

Centre for Computing in the Humanities, King's College, Kay House, 7 Arundel Street, London WC2R 3DX

The issues listed below are suggestions only. Participants are very welcome to raise other relevant topics for discussion during the seminar.

PROGRAMME

1.45	Coffee & Tea
2.00	Welcome & Introductory remarks by Neil Grindley, Methods Network
	Presentations
2.10	Structuring the indecipherable: Le Corbusier's diaries (Tim Benton) <i>It seems astonishing that one of the classic problems of research and presentation remains in the stone age: converting a database that an academic can design and use into something usable online and presentable on screen. Access (and other database packages) satisfies the former, but it seems that we have to invest tens of thousands of pounds to turn this into a robust, user friendly and transportable package for use on the web.</i> <i>One of my current research topics is to process the personal diaries of Le Corbusier and make them usable for scholars. I will outline the way I have approached the research and database and ask for help on the rest!</i>
2.45	Questions arising from presentation 1
3.00	Iconology of Anthropomorphic Landscapes in Western Art. A Digital 'face-lift' of an old method (Anna Bentkowska-Kafel) <i>Anthropomorphic landscapes are pictorial representations of nature in human forms. The composition of such artworks is based on the idea of double-imaging: an artist creates a fantastic landscape and uses its elements to represent anatomical features, or superimposes human forms onto realistic landscapes. A considerable number of such images were created in the late 16th and 17th centuries to illustrate cosmological beliefs. Modern artists might have lost interest in early modern cosmology but the use of similar compositional devices has persisted. The tools developed by mainstream art history for classification, analysis and interpretation of pictorial genres are unsatisfactory for the study of such complex and ambiguous images.</i> <i>This on-going research uses digital technology to compensate for the shortcomings of traditional methods and/or seek alternative solutions. First employed in doctorate research in 1994-98 these are now re-examined. Does this methodology still hold? Computing techniques have advanced dramatically in the last ten years, but has the use of ICT in art historical studies moved with the same speed? In a discipline where research success is measured by the number of publications, and where a printed text and still photography continue as a publication standard, the most obvious benefits of digital methodologies for art studies, such as the ease of use of images in great numbers and the interactivity of multimedia, are the very barriers that make publication difficult if not practically impossible.</i>
3.30	Questions arising from presentation 2
3.45	Tea & coffee

3.55	General discussion (Chair: Tim Benton)
	<p>Suggested issues</p> <p>Digital tools for art historians</p> <p>Steps towards the electronic classroom: what do we need to teach effectively using digital images? A good practice document, better software?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Robust digital image library systems (standard formats, metadata, copyright, distribution issues, watermarking) • Improvements or alternatives to PowerPoint (zooming and panning images, better techniques for comparison - layers?- better methods for annotating images) • Add-ons to give user friendly methods of demonstrating 'structure' and meaning in works of art (eg perspective systems) or works of architecture (eg quick-time VR interiors or 3D objects with hotspots, a tool for applying scale to drawings, measuring on the fly and comparing to scale) • Means by which students and teachers can share the same virtual domain and interact on it.
	<p>Criteria for assessing technical innovation in art historical research: technology as a criterion of innovation, as well as a factor contributing to research (products of research) becoming obsolete.</p>
	<p>The 'after-life' of digital projects and in particular the preservation and dissemination of e-research (products of) – whose responsibility is it? Problems (obsolete media, copyright etc.)</p>
5.15	Concluding remarks by Neil Grindley, Methods Network