AHRC ICT Methods Network Student Bursary Awards

DRHA (Digital Resources for the Humanities and Arts) Conference
Dartington College of Arts, 3 - 6 September 2006

CONFERENCE REPORT

Jessica M. Laccetti, D*e Montfort University.*

With great excitement I embarked on my journey to Devon, sure that my first visit to this part of the country would be filled with impressive views (geographical and philosophical) and enlivened discussion. I was not disappointed. Thanks to the generous AHRC ICT Methods Network bursary I was able to present, meet, listen to, and interact with practitioners, creators, and theorists of digital technologies.

The DRHA conference allowed me to witness current experiments with digital art including a mesmerizing installation by Emmanuelle Waeckerle called '[VINST: The Word Made Flesh Again](#)'. Without the Methods Network funding I would not have been able to experience Waeckerle's project which allows users to interact with an image of the creator in order to construct a conversation based on the dissolution of language. This encounter not only brought another aspect of dynamism to the conference but also to my own research.

While the setting of Dartington College, recognized as an institution indebted to the 'arts', was the perfect place to gather, the keynote addresses exuded a similar passion for imagination. We began in the historic setting of Professor Richard Beacham's restoration of the Hellerau Festspielhaus. Beacham wove together Adolphe Appia's 'rhythmic spaces', specialist VR technology, historic photographs, and spatial/performance conditions to illustrate the potential available between the humanities and the arts. The second keynote speaker, Professor Roy Ascott, began in the present and led audience members into a future replete with key terms such as 'syncretic', 'cyberceptions', 'moistmedia', and 'nanofield'. With Ascott's thoughts now seeping into my own, I cannot help but be moved to contribute to such a vibrant field. The final keynote lecture by Professor N. Katherine Hayles was something I had been long waiting for. As a researcher concerned with web fictions and narrative theory, Hayles' texts are those to which I often turn. Hearing Hayles exhort the importance of language (code) in both print and digital media and then elucidate and develop her theory was testament to the cultural shift she sees occurring in contemporary perception. Hayles' sentiment, that we look to two, often seen as opposing, mediums was echoed in the other keynote talks as well as felt around the general ambience of Dartington College, steeped in history yet furthering the study of innovative art practice.

As well as interacting with cutting edge creations, I was able to listen to illuminating presentations. Rather than enjoy the same presentations as my colleagues, the various session threads allowed a plethora of choices so that we each could attend different panels and then share our experiences. Additionally, if we were in need of some respite from the interesting discussions we could easily visit the myriad of installations and poster presentations. This mix meant that there was always lots going on and it also demonstrated the key premise of the conference, the interaction between the humanities and the arts. The musical performances, or sound art, were fascinating multi-modal displays of audio, visual, and human interchange. In fact, the final keynote, featuring Stelarc, seemed to physically embody the reciprocity between the arts and humanities. While Stelarc regaled the audience with details of his numerous projects, I think most people were interested in examining his latest experiment in uniting the body with technology; the third ear implant.

I left the conference having made friends, listened to exciting keynotes, shared ideas, enjoyed debates, and found collaborators. I now look forward to the next DRHA.