

Interrogating Infrastructure: A Symposium Hosted by King's Digital Lab and the Department of Digital Humanities, King's College London, July 8th, 2016

Location

Headspace, 19 - 21 Hatton Garden, London, EC1N 8BA.

Wifi

H G management / AlanShearer9

Consent form?

#KDLab

#DHinfra

Overview

The humanities are confronted not only with digital culture, tools, and methods, but a vast and continually expanding global cyber-infrastructure that underpins, enables, and challenges the work we do. The scale of this infrastructure, which ranges from physical wires threading across nations and under oceans, to library search systems, government databases, economic processes, international governance protocols, and humble desktop software, raises a plethora of issues related to epistemology and our relationship to cultural and intellectual production.

This symposium aims to reset the conversation about that infrastructure, by bringing together people interested in a very wide range of humanities infrastructure, from hacking Raspberry Pis to managing trans-national archives, building humanities laboratories, engaging in big data research, and managing teams of people. The goal is to interrogate our assumptions about what humanities infrastructure is, in order to block, hack, break, and deform our collective infrastructure-enabled futures. By timing the event immediately before DH 2016 Krakow we aim to seed ongoing conversations.

In addition to exploring humanities infrastructure, afternoon workshops will discuss the establishment of a Digital Humanities Critical Infrastructure Collective and the possible

production of a website, pamphlet or pamphlet series, edited anthology, large-scale funding proposals, media art installations, and/or future panel discussions to accompany it.

Hosts

James Smithies, Director, King's Digital Lab, King's College London.

Sheila Anderson, Head of Department, Department of Digital Humanities, King's College London.

Administrator: Tom Salyers, King's College London Department of Digital Humanities.

Schedule

10.00 - 10.30: Introductions: James Smithies & Alan Liu

10.30 - 12.00: 'Thesis in Three' presentations from all participants on the topic 'What infrastructure means to me'. Morning tea will be available throughout this session.

12.00 - 1.00: Lunch

2.00 - 3.00: DH Critical Infrastructure Collective: Outputs and next steps.

3.00 - 3.30: Afternoon tea.

3.30 - 5.00: Designing an edited anthology / breakout sessions for those after something different.

5.00 - 7.00: Drinks and nibbles.

Participants

Bob Allen, Yonsei University

Sheila Anderson, King's College London

Paul Arthur, University of Western Sydney

Jean Bauer, Princeton University

Geoff Browall, King's College London

Arianna Ciula, Roehampton University

Mark Cote, King's College London

Ginestra Ferraro, King's College London

Luis Figueira, King's College London

Elliott Hall, King's College London

Mark Hedges, King's College London

Tim Hitchcock, University of Sussex

Neil Jakeman, King's College London

Roman Klapaukh, Victoria University of Wellington

Conny Kristel, NIOD, Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies

Faith Lawrence, King's College London

Alan Liu, UC Santa Barbara
Carleigh Morgan, King's College London
Geoffroy Noël, King's College London
Daniel Powell, King's College London
Andrew Prescott, University of Glasgow
Laurent Romary, INRIA / DARIAH
Charlotte Rouche, King's College London
Tom Salyers, King's College London
Sydney Shep, Victoria University of Wellington
Anna-Maria Sichani, Huygens ING
James Smithies, King's College London
Paul Spence, King's College London
Peter Stokes, King's College London
Matt Symonds, University College London
Simon Tanner, King's College London
Melissa Terras, University College London
Deb Verhoeven, Deakin University

NOTES

Create something productive from all this

Spectrum from academic/philosophical problem to more concrete/technological basis

Is there value in putting together a collective to put together output?

Is thinking about infrastructure a way to build bridges--e.g., to science, new media studies, information science, social sciences, etc.?

Themes:

- Humanities excluded from research/infrastructure (funding and access)
- Digital humanities missing out on funding opportunities
- Make the case that arts/humanities can address global challenges
- DH isn't in the running for major grants due to infrastructure issues
- "Ecosystem" concept is an important way to look at infrastructure, partly due to the idea of the life cycle
- The problem of keeping established infrastructure going
- Very small community compared to (e.g.) neuroscience; work spread among very few people, and infrastructure suffers
- Building bridges (see above) can be a way to form a larger DH collective, but too large can be a problem

- Revive/reframe older legacy systems/projects instead of throwing them away
- Understanding infrastructure becomes just as much research as building it
- Words like “infrastructure” seem limiting to politicians, but the humanities can interrogate and expand on the concept
- STEM and computer science appreciate the humanities’ wider cultural perspective; there’s a potential for dialogue
- Are we trying to work out how to articulate this to funding bodies, or form a collective?
- Primary mission to understand infrastructure?
- People outside DH see “critical infrastructure” as something that if you take it away, everything collapses
- Use existing STEM/computational resources for DH projects? Some of it’s going idle.
- Creating an infrastructure studies collective could be a chance to work with new media studies practitioners
- Do we want an agenda/roadmap for a 10/20-year plan for infrastructure?
- Are we providers or beneficiaries?
- Inverse infrastructures?
- “Contact zones”/“boundary objects” is a useful concept for making infrastructure--a messy idea for DH--clearer

LAST DISCUSSION SESSION NOTES:

- Options--continue? Or not? Form a collective?
- Bringing in people not in the room--more new media, etc.
- First act as a collective--inventory of strengths. What differentiates us? Build a frame around that. “Here are the things we’ve been doing well.”
- Commission article(s) and/or projects to create understanding around a humanistic approach to understanding infrastructure.
- How are we different? We fill a gap no one else occupies.
- Propagandize our strengths--but in a different format? Anthologies/papers/etc. are the same thing we’ve always done.
- Who would be in this collective? What’s the membership? Preference for global community.
- Teach people how to interact/build with infrastructure?
- Have a global conversation about infrastructure
- Collapse people/things together into a way that’s adaptable to what we do in the humanities
- Conceptualize a real-world problem that DH infrastructure type methods/tools can solve (or at least help)
- How to get support/funding for building things, then telling people about it?
- Corporatization vs. idealism
- Highlight/encourage smaller projects

- Cultural/ideological implications of infrastructure. How did GLAM people become perceived as second-class academics?
- Real-world problems
- Collective -> observatory? Better term? Observatory for infrastructural complexity?
- Another meeting

Openness and democratization

Intervention and upgrade of teaching to 21st century requirements

Hacking, intervention, infrapuncture

Activity in developing countries / contact zones

Possible Outputs

- 1] Observatory within existing DH spaces to engage with infrastructure.
- 2] Web spaces
- 3] Pamphlet series
- 4] Collection of writing: projects with paired outsiders critiquing it
- 5] Exhibition, perhaps in partnership with new media (etc) colleagues - produced by the observatory. Maps, stacks, diagrams visualised as artworks. Royal College of Art as potential partner. <http://www.e-waste-performance.net>. Geographers / cartographers. Short story commissioned from a writer.

Website output

Interactive use of videos. Text analysis / transcriptions / Twitter.

Central collection point

Working bibliography

Place for dialogue: Pamphlets / forum. 1500 - 1800 words overview + videos (edited by a film-maker - distilled down to 5 minutes)

Get students to do it. Faith Lawrence?

SIG ADHO? #infradev best hashtag?

**Montreal 2017 follow-up.