CONFERENCE

AMERICAN STUDIES AFTER THE DIGITAL TURN

15-16 September 2016

Roosevelt Study Center
Abdij 9
Middelburg, The Netherlands

www.netherlands-america.nl
American Studies after the Digital Turn

We live in an era of academic “turns”: Cultural, linguistic, pictorial, transnational. The “digital turn,” raises new possibilities and predicaments for scholarly work on the United States—especially for Americanists working outside of the United States. The increased availability of digitized material has cut across other turns in American Studies: it makes some work easier, other work more difficult; it outdates some scholarly modes and revives others. Seemingly stale inquiries into American myths and symbols might have a digital revival, while the global reach of the digital might render transnationalism and interdisciplinary research less revolutionary or revisionist than scholars believed even a decade ago.

The “digital humanities” have already gone through several cycles of celebration and lament. This is a good moment to take stock. European Americanists are particularly well-positioned to discuss the impact of the digital, given their long experience with transnational and comparative inquiries in American Studies. Additionally, Americanists in Europe, in the course of teaching and researching the United States from a distance, might have different uses for digital tools than their peers in the United States.

The concerns of this conference are practical, theoretical, and polemical. The papers address Americanists’ use of digitized sources and tools. How do they process digital sources for their work? How do they combine the reading of texts with digital tools? What counts as “interdisciplinary” for a field long associated with interdisciplinarity, for better or worse?

Other papers caution about digitization’s unintended consequences. How do Americanists view the possibilities of the digital in education? Do they envision significant shifts in the balance of funding and institutional settings caused by digitized sources and tools?

Finally, scholars outside of “American Studies” proper will examine how academic narratives of America inform their work. What old or new ideas from American Studies—keywords, clichés, slogans—have been most useful or most distracting? How did digital sources help them achieve their goals?

Participants who seek advice how to enrich, combine or extend their analog projects with digital applications are more than welcome to submit this at the Roundtable. A forum of experts will offer feedback and recommendations.
PROGRAM

Thursday, 15 September 2016

09.30-10.15 Registration with Coffee and Tea

10.15 Welcoming Remarks and Opening of the Conference

10.30-11.30 Keynote Lecture

John Corrigan (Florida State University)
Digital Data and the Methodology of American Studies

11.30-12.30 The Nature and Ethics of the Digital Age

Richard Hardack (Berkeley, Independent Scholar)
The Digital Nature of Corporations: Outer as Inner Space in Avatar

The film Avatar insinuates that nature always already represented a form of digital or virtual reality.

Tim Jelfs (University of Groningen)
Pre-Occupied with Death: Serial and the Ethics of Storytelling in the Digital Age

The ethical questions that the Serial raises are a result of the conjunction of the show’s narrative techniques with a set of conditions peculiar to the digital age.

12.30-13.30 Lunch

13.30-14.30 Digital Activism

James Mackay (European University Cyprus)
Indigenous Studies, Wikipedia, and the Role of the Europe-Based Scholar

This presentation argues that European scholarship in the field of indigenous studies has been noticeably affected by immediate daily contact with Native people, causing scholars to increasingly engage in political activism, and assess the danger this brings of “speaking for” Native peoples.

Robert Allen Johnson II (Ludwig-Maximilian’s-Universität München)
The Irish in the Caribbean: The Americans & Their Own Cultural Troubles and the Power of the Meme in a Digital Historic Context

This presentation examines the digital motive power and controversy of the meme of the Irish as “slaves” in the early colonization of the Americas, especially the Caribbean and how it is used and misused. It shows the dangers and advantages of the Internet.
14.30-15.00   Coffee/Tea Break

15.00-16.00   Keynote Lecture

Miriam Posner (UCLA):
Data Trouble

Digital humanists have no particular problem talking about data. Many “traditional” humanists, though, bristle at the notion that their sources constitute “data.” And yet humanists work with evidence, and they speak of proving their claims. So is this just a problem of terminology? Miriam Posner argues in this talk that our data trouble is more substantial than we have acknowledged. The term “data” seems alien to the humanities not just because humanists are not used to computers, but because it exposes some very real differences in the way humanists and scholars from some other fields conceive of the work they do. In this talk, she will outline the specific points of tension between the notion of data and the ways that humanists work with sources, and she will explain why she thinks this epistemological divide actually suggests some incredibly interesting avenues of investigation.

16.00-17.30   Digital Assets and Liabilities

Alexander Dunst (Universität Paderborn)

This presentation will reflect on the methodological challenge of combining (qualitative) critique and computational quantification.

Melvin Wevers (Utrecht University)
The United States as a Reference Culture in Twentieth Century Dutch Newspaper Discourse on Consumer Goods

This presentation will analyze newspaper discourse on consumer goods to describe how the United States emerged as a reference culture in this domain. It argues that the Dutch perception of the United States was rather monolithic, which runs counter to attempts within American Studies to point out the plurality of American culture.

Konstantinos D. Karatzas (University of Zaragoza)
The 1921 Tulsa Race Riot Archives and the Use of Technology

This presentation will discuss the limits of technology on traditional research. Moreover, the discussion could focus on the ways of transforming an analog project to a digital one and the possibilities of combining research and teaching a 21st century American Studies class.

17.30-18.30   Reception
Friday, 16 September 2016

09.30-10.00 Registration

10.00-11.00 Keynote Lecture

Antal van den Bosch (Radboud University Nijmegen)
*Digital Humanities: How Can the Robot Humanist Be of Service?*

This presentation will explain how the type of “distant reading” that “robot humanists,” computational models, can perform on large, super-human amounts of documents, and how these analyses can help and complement traditional humanities research. Case studies include how newspapers report on strikes before they actually happen (or not), both in the United States and in Europe; and on biographies of socialist politicians in the Netherlands and the people networks that can be derived from these documents. The lecture will argue that text categorization, network discovery, and visualization are robust techniques that can be relatively directly linked to theories and debates in historical and cultural studies on evolutionary processes of adoption and change.

11.00-11.15 Coffee/Tea Break

11.15-12.30 Digital Captivity

Damian Pargas (Leiden University)
*Runaway Slaves and the Geography of Freedom: Digital Mapping Ideas*

This presentation seeks to openly brainstorm about the various possibilities for translating historical research on fugitive slaves to a digital format.

Marc Priewe (Universität Stuttgart)
*Tracing Early American Captivity Narratives: Digital Methods and Tools*

This presentation grasps the multidimensional relations of captivity narratives amongst themselves as well as their geographical expansion.

Ethan Blue (University of Western Australia)
*Spatial History, Digital Humanities, and Mapping the Routes of American Deportation*

This presentation develops a substantial digitally-housed database recording geospatial temporal detail for many dozens of deportees aboard the trains that transported deportees.

12.30-13.30 Lunch
13.30-14.30  Digital Applications I

Aynur Erdogan (University of Groningen)

Digital Research and Analog Reading: Digitalized Sources in the Classroom

This presentation will showcase how digital research and analog reading can provide impressive insights into textual mobility, and how this approach can be used in the classroom to explore early American culture.

Mark L. Thompson & Joanne van der Woude (University of Groningen)

Amerigo: A Digital Showcase for Early American Connectivity

This presentation introduces a new interdisciplinary project aiming at (re-)discovery of Groningen’s five-hundred-year history of interaction with the Atlantic World. It shows how digital technology meets archival research and scholarly interpretation.

14.30-15.00  Coffee/Tea Break

15.00-16.00  Digital Applications II

Herman Cohen Stuart (Zoetermeer, Independent Researcher)

Researching the Digital North American Indian

This project shows an analysis of all photographs and the texts in Edward S. Curtis’ twenty-volume series The North American Indian benefited from digitalized NAI versions that were available on two internet sites. The subsequent analysis, however, had to be done analogically. Herman Cohen Stuart wants to explore how the availability of a digital tool for image recognition could change the project.

Frank Mehring (Radboud University Nijmegen), Hans Krabbendam (Roosevelt Study Center), and Martin Düiring (Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance de l’Europe (CVCE), Luxemburg)

Digitizing, Mapping, Clustering: Semi-automatic Collaborative Annotation of Texts and Images in Transnational American Studies

In order to make the successful transition from using cutting-edge digital technology as a practical revolution towards an intellectual revolution, we have to devise novel theoretical and methodological tools relevant to our respective fields. How can media studies, linguistics, and network analysis help us to trace recurring narrative patterns in texts and images? In how far can digital mapping and clustering complement or revolutionize traditional practices of data mining and analyses? Turning to the case study of the cultural diplomacy of the Marshall Plan, the presentation will offer suggestions towards making digital humanities useful for transnational American studies.

16.00-17.30  Roundtable The Future of Digital American Studies in Europe

Antal van den Bosch (Radboud University Nijmegen), John Corrigan (Florida State University), Alexander Dunst (Universität Paderborn), Sebastian M. Herrmann (Universität Leipzig), Miriam Posner (UCLA), Marc Priewe (Universität Stuttgart), Jaap Verheul (Utrecht University)

17.30  End of the Conference
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