CFP: Edited Collection on "Digital Humanities Laboratories"

Announcement published by Urszula Pawlicka-Deger on Tuesday, April 21, 2020
Type:
Call for Papers
Date:
June 15, 2020
Subject Fields:
Cultural History / Studies, Digital Humanities, History of Science, Medicine, and Technology, Intellectual History, Sociology

Digital Humanities Laboratories: Global Perspectives

Editors: Urszula Pawlicka-Deger (Aalto University) and Christopher Thomson (University of Canterbury)

CFP: A proposal for Routledge (Digital Research in the Arts and Humanities Series)

What is a digital humanities lab? How can we study labs in/for the digital humanities critically? How can a digital humanities lab become involved with industry? What is the culture of digital humanities labs? How does the existence of a lab change a discipline and the humanities at large? How are infrastructure and technologies intertwined within knowledge production? In what ways does access to digital resources and the standardization of methods affect the development of knowledge in labs? How do global infrastructural differences determine what investigations are carried out in a lab?

Questions about the role of laboratories in the Digital Humanities (DH) invoke the tradition of Laboratory Studies, defined by sociologist Karin Knorr Cetina as the study of science and technology through direct observation and discourse analysis at the root where knowledge is produced, in the scientific laboratory. The ethnographic investigations of laboratories in the 1970s/1980s done by a group of sociologists (Bruno Latour, Steve Woolgar, Karin Knorr Cetina, Michael Lynch, and Harry Collins) revealed the complexity of the production of scientific facts via a place, instruments, and community. Laboratory ethnography was a seminal movement which opened up new research questions addressed later by the historians of science and geographers of scientific knowledge. These extensive studies showed that a lab can become a gateway for understanding how knowledge is constructed and gains the power to transform nature and society.

In recent years, we have seen a significant increase in the number of DH labs established in the academy and beyond. Labs in humanities departments, libraries, and archives show that there is no single model for a DH lab and that they can have many different forms (e.g., physical, virtual, and distributed), functions (e.g., research, teaching, services, archiving, collection management), and practices (e.g., building digital resources, and text analysis). We have also seen the growing interest in the concept of a laboratory in the digital humanities, as exemplified by an increasing number of conference panels as well as seminars and workshops devoted entirely to this new infrastructure. The panel session “Building the Humanities Lab: Scholarly Practices in Virtual Research Environments” at the ADHO conference at King’s College London in 2010 gave rise to further discussions concerning transmigrating laboratories from science fields to the humanities.

Having made this point, it is still true that far too little attention has been paid to the epistemological understanding of this new infrastructure and its organizational implications for scholarly knowledge production. While scientific laboratories have been much discussed, humanists have just begun to explore their own infrastructures and spaces, which have their own specific requirements, management, processes, and types of use. Matthew Kirschenbaum has described digital humanities as “tactical”, both a means to obtain agency within a highly competitive and constrained academic sphere, yet at the same time genuine in its efforts to expand the theories and methodologies of digital research. Given that laboratories are highly charged in all these ways--epistemologically, culturally and tactically--it becomes imperative to reflect critically on the institutional, material, and socio-cultural organization of digital humanities spaces. Therefore, we propose to use a laboratory as a lens for investigating the development and legitimization of digital humanities around the world.

The goal of this collection is thus to explore laboratories in digital humanities in the global context: to reflect on their epistemological and organizational implications for scholarly knowledge production, to reveal the ways labs contribute to digital research and pedagogy as they emerge globally amid varied cultural and scientific traditions, to consider how they lead to the specification of digital humanities, a process that is still on-going, and to discuss how a locally situated knowledge creation is embedded in the global infrastructure system. Through this collection, we aim to consolidate the discussion on a laboratory in the DH, encourage scholars to engage in the development of their own infrastructure, and bring digital humanists into the interdisciplinary debate concerning the notion of a laboratory as a critical site in the generation of experimental knowledge.

Following the rich tradition of Laboratory Studies, we propose to discuss the concept of a laboratory in DH from a broad range of perspectives: epistemological, methodological, sociological, cultural, critical, historical, infrastructural, technological, and industrial. The purpose is not to reproduce the discourse of the 1970s/1980s but to make this discourse a starting point for reflections on how to interrogate the organisational structures of DH, and what can be offered to Science and Technology Studies (STS) in terms of analyzing a lab from a new, critical perspective. We also position this discussion in relation to the ongoing debates in DH, including such directions as an “infrastructure turn,” a “maker turn,” and a “cultural turn.” We argue that “laboratory studies” are in an excellent position to capitalize on both the theories and knowledge developed in the DH field and open up new research inquiries.

We invite contributions to reflect on DH laboratories. Possible topics and questions fall into the following areas of approach:

1. Epistemological approach

- The exploration of different models for DH labs (e.g., physical, virtual, and distributed). How does the model entail research practices and condition knowledge creation?
- An inclusive approach to contemporary laboratories: How are DH labs situated with regards to labs in other disciplines (e.g., physics labs, natural science labs, media labs) and social spaces (e.g. social labs, community labs, citizen labs)? What can DH labs borrow from other kinds of creative spaces and conversely, what can they offer them?
- A DH lab in the GLAM sector. How are labs situated in public libraries, museums, and archives? What is the role of GLAM labs in the realization of digital (and non-digital) scholarship?
- A lab and industry. How are DH labs involved in research and the development of IT for industry? How does a DH lab become a business?

- A DH lab and indigenous knowledge. How do indigenous knowledges shape a lab's practices and culture? What are the unique origins of labs beyond (Western) scientific traditions?
- DH and allied fields. How can the DH enter into dialogue with STS, media studies, and infrastructure studies in terms of a laboratory and knowledge production?

2. Infrastructural approach
- A DH lab and the global dynamic of knowledge (distribution, access to resources, a network of collaboration). What are the global infrastructural implications for locally produced knowledge?
- A laboratory as a socio-material system. How are social and material assemblages entangled in scholarly work? How do a place's infrastructure and operational capabilities determine the affordances of research?
- Technology and knowledge production. How do technologies determine DH practices and methods? How does knowledge come to be embedded in material and digital tools? How do technologies carry social implications influencing organizational processes?
- Sustainability of laboratories. How are a place, technology, and digital projects maintained and funded? What funding models work or do not work? What new roles (such as Research Software Engineers) are enabling laboratories to sustain their capacities over longer periods?
- The complex network of laboratory work. How does a DH lab become a nexus of collaboration between the university, government and nongovernment agencies, commercial industries, and citizens?
- A laboratory and situatedness. How do the surrounding institutional, geographical, and socio-cultural environments influence DH work?

3. Critical approach
- A lab's ethos. What kind of values are embedded in a laboratory's organization, structure, funding, policy, research, and products?
- A lab culture. What kind of culture (given social structure, roles, and cultural and gender diversity) is emerging from DH labs?
- A lab and labor. Who does DH work? What is the division of labor in a DH lab? How can intersectional feminist approaches deconstruct social structure in a laboratory organization?
- A laboratory's boundaries. What are the socio-cultural boundaries of/in a lab? How are they set and represented? Who is allowed access to the lab?
- A lab and its products. What are the ideological implications of using business approaches to software development and financial management? How does the tactical element of DH affect its other commitments?
- A laboratory and public engagement. How does a lab take part in civic engagement? How does it co-construct knowledge with citizens?

Form and length of essays.
Scholars and practitioners from across the disciplines (regardless of rank, position, or institutional affiliation) will be invited to submit their contributions. We welcome contributors from around the world to build the discussion beyond DH labs in the US and Europe. Submissions should take an argumentative stance, advocating clearly and explicitly from a particular point of view. Case studies are welcome as long as they are used as starting points for reflections on some particular issue and present an argument about that subject. Collaboratively authored submissions will be welcome as

well. Contributions will range in length from 6000 to 8000 words including references.

Please send a 500-word abstract and a short bio to both editors (pawlickadeger@gmail.com; christopher.thomson@canterbury.ac.nz) by 15 June 2020.

If you have questions, please contact us at the email addresses above!

Contact Info:

Urszula Pawlicka-Deger

Contact Email:
pawlickadeger@gmail.com