SCHOLARLY EDITIONS AND THE DIGITAL AGE: TEXT AND MUSIC

The interdisciplinary workshop, “Scholarly Editions and the Digital Age: Text and Music,” took place on Friday, August 31st, 2012. The IU Memorial Union did an excellent job accommodating the conference and facilitating both technology and hospitality. The conference ran from 9am to 6:30pm. This was slightly longer than scheduled: there was much to discuss, and the discussions were extensive, passionate, and richly collegial.

On Friday, eleven speakers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds presented on a variety of issues in digital humanities. After introductions were given by Rosmarie McGerr of Medieval Studies and Giuliano Di Bacco of the Center for the History of Music Theory and Literature, Martha Nell Smith (University of Maryland) set the tone for the conference with a provocative call for the digital humanities to avoid settling for strictly functional ends, but rather to continue investing itself in progressive scholarly methodologies.

The application of digital humanities initiatives within diverse academic fields at Indiana University was represented by William Newman, of the Department of the History and Philosophy of Science, who shared his impressive efforts to use technology to map the complex thought of Isaac Newton; John Walsh of the School of Library and Information Science, whose work on the Swinburne uses hypertextuality to draw together diverse data to provide a comprehensive view of poet Charles Algernon Swinburne that is deeply embedded in the culture of the Victorian era; and H. Wayne Storey of the Department of French and Italian, who asked provocative questions about how digital editions condition our view of the stability, and even the very definition of the textual object. Three additional speakers from Indiana University represented programs at IU specifically devoted to exploring and promoting the application of digital technology to scholarship—the Digital Library Program and the Institute for Digital Arts and Humanities. Michele Dalmau provided an overview of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) and its uses; Dot Porter focused on the specific challenges represented by medieval manuscripts, focusing on the use of two new tools, Juxta and the Versioning Machine, to create digital editions of these unique sources; and Clara Henderson, whose presentation focused on the challenges of digital editions to traditional scholarly practicalities of peer review and publication.

Several guests from outside of IU also participated. In addition to Martha Nell Smith, Perry Roland of the University of Virginia shared his work on the Music Encoding Initiative, a set of parameters that can be used to render musical repertories machine-readable; Richard Freedman of Haverford College showed us how such technologies could be adapted to the specific stylistic repertoire of the French Renaissance chanson; Ben Albritton from Stanford focused on the creation of platforms in which various digital humanities resources might be used in productive convergence; and James Ginther of Saint Louis University discussed how best to facilitate productive relationships between digital humanities specialists and the less technologically-inclined specialists in particular fields of the humanities who hope to draw upon these new resources.

Friday’s question session was spirited, and touched upon several important issues ranging from the impact of digital editions on traditional parameters of scholarly authorship to the important issue of archival permanence in an increasingly digital world.
The active participation of interested scholars without technological background reaffirmed the importance to the future of digital humanities of dialogue between various fields of experience—a dialogue that was well-served by these same discussions.

The following morning, several of the participants returned for an informal “study day.” This session was focused more specifically on music. Giuliano Di Bacco shared the extensive new initiatives that are being taken to bring the resources offered by CHMTL up to date with developments in the Text Encoding Initiative and digital publishing. Perry Roland, Richard Freedman, and Ben Albritton responded with some additional thoughts on the application of the previous day’s discussions to musical scholarship and the unique challenges posed by musical texts to digital representation. Don Byrd, of the IU School of Informatics, spoke on music encoding. Several additional music specialists were present as discussants, including Matthew Balensuela (De Pauw University), Linda Cummins (University of Alabama), Stefano Mengozzi (University of Michigan), and Jan Herlinger (Louisiana State University).

On both days, presentation materials and audio were streamed on the Web via Adobe Connect. Although online participation was small (roughly five-to-ten participants at a time throughout the day on Friday), this was a valuable experiment in using Webinar tools to open up our work to audiences beyond the physical conference space. Roughly fifty to sixty people were in attendance on Friday, providing truly active, participatory feedback. Question sessions at academic conferences can often settle into disappointing rote patterns—but, to the contrary, we felt that genuine conversations emerged from these sessions, many of which spilled into the following day. Although the more focused topic matter of the study day made for a smaller group, an audience of roughly ten to twenty participants, in addition to panelists and discussants, were in attendance.

- Daniel Bishop, CHMTL Editorial Assistant