

PERSPECTIVES ON THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

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Mining and Mapping History

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325 BEHRAKIS HALL

As technological sophistication permeates humanistic inquiry and analysis, it reshapes both the scale and the kind of historical questions we can now ask. This is especially true as access to unprecedented amounts of data creates new research opportunities and challenges. This talk will explore the results of two ongoing projects in which new technologies and methodologies have facilitated novel approaches to making sense of the historical record.

One project employs the vast digital library of Google Books to reexamine Walter Houghton's characterizations of the Victorians from his seminal *The Victorian Frame of Mind* (1957). Instead of surveying only the well-known literary canon as Houghton did, browsing the thousands of lesser-known authors adds considerable nuance to his interpretations and sometimes contradicts them. Another project maps botanical expeditions to reveal collecting patterns that would otherwise remain invisible. Spatial analysis provides an important complement to the textual record of these expeditions, and suggests new questions about the commercial and political motives of these collection efforts. More broadly, these projects illustrate how the digital humanities are not only reshaping research practices, but also blurring disciplinary boundaries and transforming the representation of historical knowledge.