Evaluating Digital Scholarship
CAA THATCamp, New York
February 10, 2015

I. **Introduction**
- Alice Lynn: After yesterday's session on Digital Karnak and VSim, we decided we needed more discussion on the topic of evaluating digital research.
- CAA currently has a task fork in place to create guidelines for evaluating digital humanities projects
- Introduction of people in attendance:
    o Alice Lynn McMichael, CUNY
    o Ben Zweig– CASVA
    o Betty Leigh Hutcheson, College Art Association
    o Chris Sundt, Visual Resources Association
    o Darren Floyd, Bowling Green State University
    o DeWitt Godfrey, Colgate University
    o Elizabeth Buhe, Institute of Fine Arts PhD student
    o Emily Pughe, Getty Research Institute/Editor *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*
    o Gail Feigenbaum, Getty Research Institute
    o Liz Lastra, University of Pennsylvania PhD student
    o Michael Fahlund, College Art Association
    o Perry Collins, NEH Program Officer
    o Quinn Dupont, University of Toronto/Dalhousie University
    o Sarah Sidoti, Taylor & Francis
    o Sarah Zabrodski, College Art Association
    o Stephanie Grimes, Getty Publications
    o Victoria Sabo, Duke University

II. **Discussion**
- Emily: *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*
    o It was a standard print journal, but we wanted the presentation of tools to be included. This was time consuming and needed money.
    o JSAH revamp
    o We couldn't design a container without knowing the content. We talk about the scholarship while designing a container for it
    o Work with authors as they're conceptualizing and building their projects. Accept projects before they are even finished
    o Project narratives help define roles (intellectual work, technology, etc.)
    o Useful for giving people models of what has been successful before
    o Peer review of proposals, help from UCLA
    o Send out projects out for article prizes and additional recognition

- Elizabeth: Recently published a digital humanities article with virtual space and digital components, which was published on *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide*
  - My project was on the back burner, because I needed a way to visualize it
  - Created a navigable 3D historic museum, recreated objects in galleries
  - Couldn't theorize project till possible to see it in 3D
  - Integrated written and visualize component
  - Can publish a lot of archival material alongside it, because of the project being online (couldn't do so in a traditional publication)
  - The abstract/pitch/proposal was reviewed and then obtained funding
- Emily: Digital component has raw material and data, which reader can explore
  - Scholarly component might give one view into that raw data
  - Some thesis and argumentation, but in science mode there is also a lot of raw material for others to use
  - Slippage between digital tool and digital publication
  - Resource for viewer and the writer
  - Step of transforming or extracting something out of material to illustrate an argument
  - Example: One project mapped the journey of a sculptor in Italy. There is a thesis and argument in the article in addition to raw material.
- Alice Lynn: There are two contributions: article and data
- Chris: The tools are the research
  - Critical review following creation of tool
- Alice Lynn: Can we unpack the term "tool"?
- Chris: Tool is what functions in formulating the conclusion of research (taking photo, gathering data, etc.) Tools are not products, but tools can be evaluated.
- Emily: Traditional categories are now overlapping
- Elizabeth: Hired an external firm from outside university (funded through Mellon) and they used their own proprietary code. Budget was $6,000 from journal plus $1,500.
- Emily: Sometimes authors did own tech work, others went through university, some went with external entities
- DeWitt: Are there concerns about 3D model being frozen if external company goes out of a business?
- Elizabeth: A lot of concerns about this, but project was limited by funding
  - Finding the right collaborator can be difficult
- DeWitt: I've heard several examples of people doing custom made projects, but none of them use "off the shelf" proven software that has been used for decades. Why aren't these projects done with something like AutoCAD? An investment in an industry standard company means it's unlikely it will go away and become obsolete.
- Elizabeth: There is no interface where you can go to find collaborators, so it felt like trying to find needle in a haystack

- o Question of priorities
- o Firm wanted model to look good
- o I just wanted it to just be fully conceptualized
- Victoria: would you have been supported if you tried to use technology yourself?
    - o Teaching how to people to do this, but at a certain point they won't get beyond unless they invest a lot of time. But will this be valued?
- Elizabeth: I didn't have the time or capacity to do it myself
- Darren: The needles in the haystack are my students
    - o Professors could design courses around creating these projects
- Perry: What was the evaluation like at the end of the project?
- Emily: We need a community of peers in order to review. It's a chicken or egg situation.
    - o Questions that you would imagine a peer reviewer to ask requires knowing these things in practical terms, not just abstract
- Gail: Prize for best digital project
    - o Idea came from promotion and tenure committees who felt people weren't being credited for digital work, so decided to incentivize it
    - o Biggest problem was evaluating whether digital aspects were exploited in a good way
    - o What are you evaluating for in something like Elizabeth's model? Reviewing her scholarship? The work of the tech firm?
- DeWitt: Commissioning firm is almost like commissioning a photographer
- Elizabeth: There's a lot of work involved that isn't even transparent in the end
- Emily: Evaluation depends on the particular project, sometimes building digital aspect requires more intellectual work than others
- DeWitt: Sciences already have models for assigning credit. This could be one instructive model.
- Emily: Narrative that goes into depth about who did what.
- Quinn: Tend to fetishize the technology in the humanities. People are blown away by the technology. Hidden labor doesn't get credited, especially in open source projects.
- Chris: Lack of sustainability with these projects. Highlighted at one time, but no one bothered to keep them alive. Should we be worried about peer review? Or does author have responsibility to ensure it remains alive?
    - o Less than ¼ of projects featured in VRA remain
- Alice Lynn: A lot of projects don't depend on journals. Instead self-published.
    - o Is it OK to publish in multiple ways and multiple places? Increase chances of work remaining available. Libraries as repositories?
- DeWitt: This could be compared to self-published artist projects (which are okay). The artist makes work available to critics with the hope that it will be featured in a list, article, or review. For creative work, universities look for assessment within larger, critical universe.
- Emily: What do we talk about when we talk about a digital publication?

- Gail: Peer review process usually involves feedback and then changes. Peer review raises the possibility that you'll be rejected and deemed unworthy. If there are no consequences then why do it?
- Emily: Differences between review and assessment
- Victoria: Consequences are respect of colleagues
- DeWitt: For centuries artists have hired others to do work. Issue of hidden later. Difference between scholars and practitioners.
- Victoria: Exposing choices is important, which exposes hidden labor and infrastructure
- Chris: Exposing choices also important for sustainability (this same idea should be applied to art)
- Perry: Not everything has to live in perpetuity. Some things can just be snapshots.
    - o   NEH requires a data plan and a process description.
- Chris: But people should be able to build on it and then credit it
- Ben: "Documentation" is the key word here
- Chris: That information would be very solid and persuasive for whoever is reviewing
- Emily: This happens in traditional publication too, but its more hidden and we don't even realize its there
- Victoria: People should be credited as authors, not just acknowledged
- Perry: New ways of citing even smaller contributions (citations, etc.)
- Ben: Think of movie credits. Break down of labor.