

First Annual Meeting 1-2 December 2000 University of Virginia

Session 1: Tools for the Whole Community

NINCH Project: "Guide to Good Practice: A New Model"

Chair: Peter Hirtle, *Cornell University*

Presenters: Lorna Hughes, *Humanities Computing, New York University*; Richard Rinehart, *Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives*

After an opening welcome from Stanley Katz over lunch, the first session examined the approach to Best Practices in NINCH's Guide to Good Practice in the Digital Representation and Management of Cultural Heritage Materials. Lorna Hughes rehearsed the history of the process that began in January 1999, while Richard Rinehart, looking forward, etched out some ideas of how the Guide could help the community. For starters, it could help us:

- develop tools;
- train our community;
- map the territory, (including identify the gaps in our knowledge and expertise;
- guide funders); and
- track future developments, with the Guide becoming an ongoing, "living" document.

Peter Hirtle suggested the importance of our not "writing" the "best practices," but critically examining existing ones. The Guide will be based on extensive interviews with 30 major digitization sites and will engage their current practices.

A lively discussion ensued with the audience, beginning with Steven Hensen asking how the NINCH activity differed from creating standards. Rick, returning to Peter Hirtle's comment, emphasized that the Guide was not prescriptive so much as a map of current practice, held against a set of principles. Patricia Barnett appreciated the fact that this was a grass-roots effort rather than one dominated by a funder.

There was extensive discussion of how to keep the project "alive" and up-to-date after it is published. Joan Lippincott suggested an editorial board structure to facilitate revision and there was a fairly unanimous call to the working group to work on this important issue. What about volunteer editors? Rinehart suggested that one way to attract volunteers would be to emphasize each community's opportunity to have a voice in defining the "best practices" in its area. Professional credit must be attached to such a position. Stan expressed serious doubt that this could be solved without further funding.

Session 2: Intra-Community Alliances

NINCH Project: "Building and Sustaining Digital Collections: Models for Libraries and Museums - A Conference"

Chair: Susan Fox, *Society of American Archivists* **Presenters:** Stanley Katz, *Princeton University*; Patricia Williams, *American Association of Museums*

The Business Model Problem is compelling and problematic. This invitational conference, planned with the Council for Library and Information Resources for February 2001, will bring together some of the most prominent examples of business models in the field of digitization, including "hybrid" solutions. This session led to spirited discussion from the audience. Some expressed serious concern about the "business" approach and asked if alternative models would get "equal time" at the meeting.

To a question about what the goal of the meeting was, Stanley Katz replied that a report on these exemplary models was one goal; beyond that NINCH would have to determine what it could do: perhaps a follow-up meeting that could discuss business and alternative models. The group had a vigorous discussion on the problems of providing free access to information in an environment where university administrators are lured by profits. Mark Kornbluh pointed to the dilemma of information technology, in which, although offering enormous promise, it allows for the creation of more division between information haves and have-nots because of the expenses involved.

Session 3: Computer Science and Humanities Alliances A. NINCH

Project: Building Blocks

Chair: Steven Wheatley, *American Council of Learned Societies*

Presenters: Mark Kornbluh, *H-Net, Michigan State University*; W. N. Martin, *University of Virginia*

Mark Kornbluh discussed the origins of the Building Blocks Workshop, placing it within the context of the overall Computer Science and Humanities Initiative. The original intent was to focus first on humanists before turning to computer scientists. Worthy Martin, the only computer scientist in the workshop, described his experience in the Language and Literature group. It was interesting to him to note that many of the issues raised were not technological, but social, such as peer review and tenure battles.

When asked to describe some of the specific projects that came out of the meeting, Mark said that the History Field had been inspired by Michael Grossberg's question,

"how can technology change the way we do things, and lead to a new analysis?" They proposed projects that seek new ways of visualizing change over time, new analytical tools, and new ways of visualizing historical landscapes. Grossberg himself was taking on a publication project, at the History Cooperative, to demonstrate the new kind of argument that can be made using digital material. Worthy pointed to the Language and Literature group's proposal for new models of peer review of electronic scholarly publication. They expressed an urgent need for institutional support in the form of tools, institutes, and postdoctoral fellowships.

SESSION 4: Computer Science and Humanities Alliances (Continued)

B. NINCH Project: Computer Science and Humanities Conference **Co-Chairs:** Steven Wheatley, *American Council of Learned Societies*; Stanley Katz, *Princeton University*

Stanley Katz then led a discussion of the Computer Science and Humanities Conference Series, which will address, in part, humanists' need for unique tools. Marjory Blumenthal suggested some ways that humanists can engage computer scientists more effectively (hinted at in the Computing and Humanities Roundtable report of 1997). She noted that computer scientists have been more open than humanists to the intersection of commercial and nonprofit activity. Mark Kornbluh suggested that it is too much for humanists to think they can influence new computer science research. Is it not enough, he asked, to come up with new, creative applications of their research?

C. The Way Ahead

William Wulf, National Academy of Engineering

William Wulf, President of the National Academy of Engineering, opened by discussing computer science itself. It seemed an odd academic discipline, embracing science (which, he said tries to understand what is) and engineering (which creates what is not). He felt that it was vital for computer scientists and humanists to work together to stretch their thinking, to ask new and deep questions and to create new tools. He suggested that fruitful areas for discussion might include:

- the overlap of values, ethics, and legal issues between the two communities;
- permanent storage (and the relevance of Moore's Law);
- archiving (and different forms of the representation of knowledge);
- non-numerical computer architecture;
- deep semantic understanding (now being shadowed forth in talk about the semantic Web);
- the dynamic change inherent in computational objects; and

- questions about what constitutes standards of proof: for example, in simulation, what is convincing?

Richard Rinehart followed up by suggesting that the preservation and storage of digital art could clearly benefit from this partnership, while John Unsworth encouraged research based on existing digital collections.

Pat Williams suggested the need to build evaluation procedures into the conferences, perhaps to have outside evaluators on the scene. Others suggested an online think tank to parallel the conferences. An online discussion or forum could coincide with or precede the conferences. Rick added that these could coincide with a series of mini-symposia around the country where scholars, scientists, librarians, etc., could convene for roundtable discussions that could report to the online forum.

Session 5: Forum Plenary

Conclusions & Next Steps **Chair:** Pat Williams, American Association of Museums

Intellectual Property, although not a subject of discussion during the Forum, was held up again as a subject of primary importance. The question arose as to whether NINCH should draft its own statement? There was great interest in the idea emerging from Building Blocks of creating summer institutes for research and training in digital issues. Michael Jensen talked about the work of the History Cooperative and Arnita Jones discussed the American Historical Association and its Gutenberg-e prize. This led to a discussion of scholarly concerns about e-publishing. Should we encourage publishers to join NINCH? What would a history pre-print server look like? Can history be a test bed for other discipline areas and would there be general community buy-in? What is the future of online peer review?

Patricia Williams led the wrap-up, asking all members for any last words. All felt very well served by the meeting and looked forward to the next.

Session 6: IATH: How & Why it Happened

Presenter: Jerome McGann, University of Virginia

Jerome McGann gave a guided electronic tour of the history of IATH, followed by John Unsworth's demonstration of some of the remarkable and groundbreaking digital projects currently being developed by the Institute.