Intersections

New perspectives for ‘public humanities’
(HFC-INT 2020)

Call for papers

Day of study
Venice (Italy)-online, Thursday, December 3, 2020

Discover more on www.humanitiesforchange.org or contact intersections@humanitiesforchange.org.
The international network Humanities for Change (www.humanitiesforchange.org), in accordance with the interdisciplinary spirit and the contaminatory approach that characterize its activities, intends to organize an international day of study on the theme of 'public humanities'. The meeting, called "Intersections. New perspectives for public humanities", aims to stimulate some reflections coming from different fields of knowledge and to encourage the dialogue between researchers on the possibilities of the humanities to escape from academic circles. In this sense, the main object of study is the analysis of methodologies and tools related to knowledge dissemination practices for historical, artistic and philological-literary disciplines. Particular attention will also be given to new professional figures connected to the degree courses of the humanities faculties (such as the ‘public historian’) and to the interactions of these professional figures with the new media of communication and mass dissemination.

List of topics

History

The public dimension of the humanities has developed over the last fifty years in different fields. One of these is history, which has seen the affirmation of digital public history outside the academy, in order to go beyond the classroom and immerse oneself in the real world. In particular, public history has been developing in the United States since the 1970s and responds both to the need of historians to employ their training outside of universities and to the needs of a non-specialist public that wants to live and learn about history beyond the traditional channels, thus overcoming the self-referentiality of the elite and addressing the non-experts in particular (https://humanitiesforchange.org/en/2020/03/13/a-new-horizon-for-history/). In this regard, the role of digital is paramount, opening the doors to the general public and guaranteeing the maximum circulation and usability of knowledge. Therefore, a voice will be given here to the contributions which, in the spirit of public history, promote the sharing of knowledge and full accessibility to sources.

In the Italian and international context, for example, some digital public history projects concern shared digital memories, and are linked in particular to the 20th century. This is
the case of “Memoro”, the memory bank (http://www.memoro.org/), an international non-profit project born in 2007 and implementable by users that collects the memories of people born before 1950 through audio and video stories, in order to reconstruct the small and big history. Another example is the “Ultime lettere di condannati a morte e di deportati della Resistenza italiana” [“Last letters of death sentenced and deported prisoners of the Italian Resistance”] (http://www.ultimelettere.it/), also born in 2007, which collects documentary material from the archival funds of the “Istituto per il Movimento di Liberazione in Italia” [“Institute for the Liberation Movement in Italy”] and is continuously expanded by users. Furthermore, the “Archivio degli Iblei” [“Hyblei archive”] (http://www.archiviodegliiblei.it/), born in 2013, is a virtual participatory archive where citizens are called to expand the archive with online resources to promote the historical and cultural heritage of the Hyblaean area through the concept of active citizenship.

Arts

In the art world, the current health emergency linked to the spread of the Covid-19 viral phenomenon has clearly highlighted the importance of digital resources for museums or galleries. Now more than ever before, on the other hand, at a time when mobility has been reduced to situations of extreme necessity and museums have been forced to close, the problem of the digital divide has emerged: if before digital was almost an accessory element that the museum or gallery could boast, now it has proved to be an indispensable tool to guarantee the public at least remote access to the collections. Online is in fact more and more necessary to reach the artistic contents: virtual rooms are born, such as those presented through a telepresence robot by the Hastings Contemporary Museum in England (https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/15/arts/museums-robots-coronavirus.html), or web art lessons, as in the case of the artist Martin Morris, who presents and produces his artworks live (https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2020/apr/20/art-world-coronavirus-pandemic-online-artists-galleries). In this section we will welcome contributions for a reflection on how the artwork can be disseminated on a large scale, also with attention to digital content in the art world and to the didactical issues (https://humanitiesforchange.org/2020/04/24/valore-umano-nella-didattica-digitale-della-storia-dellarte/) or the role of social networks (https://humanitiesforchange.org/2019/12/06/parlare-di-arte-nellera-social/).

Can digital replace a real work of art? Since only large museum institutions have sufficient resources to exploit the potential of digital, how much power will giants like Google acquire? Conversely, what will be the fate of smaller museums that will necessarily have to rely on Google to define the boundaries of the art world? In this context, the theories of Bourdieu and Becker regarding the creation of artistic value and cultural significance should be taken into account. Has digital deprived art of its task of collective social space? Is the digital experience a mutilated experience? The public is vital for the survival of a museum, but now we have to rethink about a reorganization for remote fruition: how many museums have
managed, for example, to face the pandemic? Could it be a valid solution to the problems of mobility and environmental sustainability (thinking about travel and the problems of global warming)?

**Literature**

The outflow of content from classrooms and lecture halls is perhaps more difficult as far as the literary field is concerned. The contributions in this section can probe the sociological dynamics of diffusion and reception of specific literary works or genres outside the academic sphere. Some examples on the first side concern the pop reinterpretation of literary texts that are part of the canon of Italian and/or world literature, such as through performing arts, film reductions, graphic novels... In the second case, however, a certain genre, such as poetry or detective stories, can be taken into consideration in order to draw a picture of its diffusion outside the purely academic sphere. Think of the “Movement for the Emancipation of Poetry” (MeP, http://mep.netsons.org/beta/) or similar experiences involving new digital communication technologies and social networks (https://humanitiesforchange.org/2019/10/11/la-poesia-vive-le-nuove-forme-del-discorso-poetico/). This section can also include theoretical reflections that support the importance of the humanistic heritage in everyday life by studying, for example, how mythologems can shed light on fundamental contemporary issues such as immigration or ecology (https://humanitiesforchange.org/2019/11/22/sul-mito-e-sullattualita-del-suo-linguaggio/).

Finally, we accept contributions that highlight the potential of the digital environment as a privileged channel of communication for an exponential expansion of the public. The most immediate example are the digital scholarly editions, on which Tiziana Mancinelli and Elena Pierazzo talk in “Che cos’è un’edizione scientifica digitale” (Rome, Carocci, 2020, https://humanitiesforchange.org/2020/02/28/le-edizioni-scientifiche-digitali-una-terra-incognita/), but it is also necessary to remember the enterprise of Google Books, which has scanned and digitalized more than twenty-five million books, renouncing the manual correction of material and therefore proposing texts that are freely accessible to anyone, but unfortunately often incorrect. To overcome this problem there are initiatives of public engagement and crowdsourcing (i.e. recruiting a voluntary audience for the transcription of the text to be digitized), such as that of “The Medici Archive Project” (https://www.medici.org/the-medici-interactive-archive-mia/), an American institute based in Florence, whose aim is the creation of digital editions of the archival documents of the Medici family. But transcription requires not indifferent linguistic and palaeographic skills: can we always trust a not undifferentiated public whose skills we do not know? What could be the most suitable solutions to reconcile philology, digital and ethics?
Submission Guidelines

The study day is addressed to PhD students, PhDs and researchers related to Italian and foreign institutions. Interested participants are invited to submit a proposal for intervention at https://bit.ly/HFC-INT-2020 no later than Friday, May 29, 2020. Each proposal must contain:

✓ name, surname, e-mail address and academic affiliation;
✓ a short bio-bibliographical note (max. 1,000 characters including spaces);
✓ a short abstract of the intervention accompanied by a provisional title (max. 1,500 characters including spaces).

We accept interventions in the following languages: Italian and English. The expected duration of each paper is about 20 minutes. Publication of the conference proceedings is foreseen.

Venue

The conference will be held in Venice, Italy and will take place on Thursday, December 3, 2020. The event will be streamed on YouTube. The designated venue will be announced in the coming months.

✓ Speakers residing in Italy will have to physically go to the meeting venue, unless there are particular health restrictions limiting travel: in this case, video-connected availability is sufficient (probably with a video call via Google Meet). Any travel and/or accommodation expenses for speakers residing in Italy are to be borne by the participants.
✓ Scholars living outside Italy who cannot reach the lagoon city will be able to present their speech in telematic mode, probably with a video call via Google Meet.

The organizing committee will take care to select the contributions and to communicate to the interested participants the acceptance or not of the intervention proposal. The request for participation implies a commitment to participate in the study day.

Organizing committee

The event is organized by the international network Humanities for Change (www.humanitiesforchange.org) and is promoted by the Venice Centre for Digital and Public Humanities (VeDPH), that is part of Ca’ Foscari University of Venice (www.unive.it/vedph).

✦ Marco Sartor (PhD candidate in Philological-Literary, Historical-Philosophical and Artistic Sciences at University of Parma)
Francesco Venturini (MA student in Philosophy at Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Milan)

Paola La Barbera (unstructured researcher graduated in Ancient Civilisations: Literature, History and Archaeology at Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Irene Mamprin (First level Professional Master’s programme in Digital Humanities at Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Contacts
All questions about submissions should be emailed to intersections@humanitiesforchange.org.