

Who Minds the Text Miners?  
River Ramuglia

Abstract:

This presentation explores the use of the metaphors of mining and natural resource extraction in the digital humanities practice of text analytics. By performing close (as opposed to distant) readings of selections from work by DH practitioners Matthew Jockers and Ted Underwood, I intend to show that casual use of this metaphor is deeply problematic. For a field of study arguably still in its infancy, the language we use to frame the humanities' use of digital analytical tools could have severe effects for the non-computational production and study of literature in the future. More specifically, this presentation asks what it means to associate non-computational study of literature with indigeneity, particularly when the use of DH tools is dependent on the ongoing extraction of "rare earth" minerals in regions of the world where local populations have been devastated economically, politically, and environmentally by such mining activities.

Bio:

River Ramuglia, originally from Anchorage, Alaska, is a PhD candidate at Ghent University. He holds a B.A. from the University of Oregon and an M.A. from King's College London. Most recently he taught at St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas and managed political campaigns in Alaska. He works with Professor Stef Craps on the project "Imagining Climate Change: Fiction, Memory, and the Anthropocene," researching the metaphor, symbol, and theme of "shelter" as it is deployed in contemporary climate change fiction and ecocriticism, as historicized by the cultural proliferation of the "fallout shelter" during the Cold War.