Atlanta Housing Interplay: Reinventing the Digital Monograph

- *This panel will discuss Atlanta Housing Interplay, a new digital art history project in development at Emory University. The project, focused on the first public housing projects built in Atlanta in the 1930s, seeks to provide a model for a published, digital monograph. The talk will explain the origins of Atlanta Housing Interplay, its structure, and how it will bridge the gap between traditional print scholarship and interactive online projects. The panel will explore the issues of platform, publishing, and target audience and talk about striking a balance between academic research and public history.*

- **Atlanta Housing Interplay: Expanding the Interwar Housing Map**
  - Started in 2015 by Christina Crawford
  - Art History and Architect by training - examining the first “slum clearance” projects in the United States - take place in Atlanta
    - Techwood Homes - 1934
    - University Homes - 1936
  - Interested in their role setting the foundations for how public housing would be planned and designed in the United States
  - Atlanta acts as a testing ground where European public housing ideas are imported and remixed for the American context

- **Future of the Monograph in the Digital Age**
  - Atlanta Housing Interplay has become one of two “trial balloons” for what a digital monograph should look like
    - Mapping Senufo under Susan Gagliardi is the other
  - Projects part of institutional interest:
    - 2015 report by Michael Elliott on the working group convened at Emory during the 2014-2015 academic year
  - Michael Elliott - Dean of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
    - Background in English and American Studies
    - “One of Us”
  - Attempt to examine how a model of university-funded monograph publication could improve the publishing landscape for scholars in the humanities and facilitate the looming digital transition.
  - Emphasized the importance of the monograph as the premium method of presenting
    - **Monograph Definition:** peer reviewed, detailed written work on a single specialized subject, whose presentation of evidence, argument, and conclusions do not fit within the constraints of an academic journal publication
  - White paper also conceived of a continuum of long-form humanities scholarship
    - Print Monographs - *A Book*
    - Long-form scholarship published digitally with a strong resemblance to print monographs - *Open access, print on demand monographs*
- Long-form scholarship published digitally that is substantially enhanced by the digital format - **Southern Spaces**
- Digitally published, long-form scholarship that is not suitable for print publication - **Enchanting the Desert**

**The Importance of Medium**
- A traditional print monograph has been popular for so long because it is an extremely effective method of conveying information
  - Scholars like print monographs for several reasons:
    - Narrative
    - Bounded - we know when it was finished, it draws a line in the sand that we can point to
    - We also know who wrote it - single-authored, co-authored, etc.
  - To quote Willy Wonka, "It’s all there, black and white, clear as crystal" - well, we hope.
- A print monograph turned into a PDF and distributed online is still a print monograph.
  - You’ve used the digital as a method of transmission rather as a publication medium
  - It aims to do all the same things that a print monograph does but without physical paper. To some this is convenient, to others this is annoying
- If you’re going to commit to a digital monograph, it is important to recognize that a digital medium is different than a physical medium

**Digital Incunabula**
- What does a truly digital monograph look like? Some examples:
  - CSI Dixie - Merges the monograph with the digital archive - Stephen Barry calls it an **archigraph** - “a set of records (an archive) married to a set of judgments about those records (a monograph).”
  - Enchanting the Desert - Almost a visual hypertext. Takes the slideshow of Henry Peabody and imposes layers of context and potential exploratory paths.
    - Includes, essays, maps, photographs, 3d recreations, etc.
  - CSI Dixie is very linear and very clean. You can navigate however you’d like, but it is clear how the website is designed to flow.
  - Enchanting the Desert, like many hypertexts, has issues with navigation. With so many potential avenues of exploration, harder to nail down the narrative.
  - To Be Expected - This is not to slight Enchanting the Desert since it is an impressive project that is constantly referenced as a way to pair text, images, maps, video, etc.
  - To paraphrase Terry Harpold, we are still in the **incunabula** phase of digital narratives and digital monographs.
Like incunabula, we’re seeing things that are very traditional, we’re seeing experiments, we’re seeing projects that live briefly and disappear.

Eventually, the field will coalesce around what works, but it is hard to see where the field is going when you’re standing in the middle of it.

**Atlanta Housing Interplay**

- Without a consensus concerning the form of the digital monograph, we’ve found it easier to be guided by “Who is going to read this?”
  - Form has to follow function. If you decide on your digital platform first, you’re setting yourself up to be instantly limited by the space you’ve chosen.
- The audience is Art and Architectural Historians *
- Art and Architectural Historians operate at the intersection of visual and discursive arguments. **Visual and spatial materials are vital.** Subsequently, the digital monograph has to have a way to weave these together without privileging one over the other.
- The asterisk - digital projects are inherently public projects. We’d like to create a digital monograph that is accessible to a larger audience who is interested in Atlanta, public housing, digital humanities etc. Has to lend itself to the digital environment where the structure and delivery is different than a print monograph.

**Atlanta Housing Interplay**

- Two independent but interconnected registers
- **Dr. Crawford** - Linear, long-form text with visualizations
  - Five Chapters
    - Atlanta as Place
    - INPUT: European Grand Tour
    - Techwood
    - University
    - OUTPUT: American Public Housing
  - Read and see how Palmer absorbed the lessons of European public housing and used Atlanta as a fertile testing ground. Shaped by segregation and Jim Crow. Lessons learned from Atlanta then brought to other American sites that became part of WPA public housing projects.
  - Designed to present an argument supported by both images/visualizations and text - **Art and Architectural History lends itself to digital narratives in that textual and visual arguments can be presented with equal weight**
- **Students** - organized by **Theme**- Shorter, thematic research texts tied more directly to richer visual materials
- Student work can be directly cited and linked within the narrative text - provide something akin to **interactive footnotes as opposed to hypertext**
  - Maintains the narrative structure while still allowing for depth and expansion of ideas
- In Chapter 2 - can jump to a thematic exploration of Naples to get the deep dive before returning to Crawford narrative
- Also deals with the issue of invisible labor. Student research and efforts are transparent. Atlanta Housing Interplay is a collaborative work with a single-author narration. Be open about where contributions have occurred
  - Potential for expandability - could be something for other scholars and students
  - Potential for print-on-demand of Dr. Crawford’s narrative. Two advantages:
    - Emphasizes the bound nature of the single-authored narrative
      - Provides a strong argument for tenure and for peers skeptical of digital scholarship

- **Medium vs. Platform**
  - Work with publisher to decide platform. Don’t want to try to pitch a publisher using a platform that they neither like nor will support
    - **Manifold, Palladio + Breve, Scalar, Vega, etc.**
      - Publishers are adamant that they do not like Wordpress
      - Publishers like the idea of being finite
        - With an end, publishers know exactly what they’re getting into
        - Funders feel the same thing - not just throwing money after money
      - Faculty like it as well - like the feeling of completion
        - David Eltis - trans-atlantic slave trade database - “albatross”
        - Helps with peer review and tenure - recognizable as a publication if it is finite

- **Conclusion**
  - Commit to digital monograph.
  - Atlanta Housing Interplay
    - Aiming somewhere between ebook and interactive visualization
    - Narrative enhanced by digital medium, but still recognizable to traditionalists as a monograph
  - Think about function and targeting the appropriate medium, ideally form will flow from there
  - Questions?