

Penn State Max Kade German-American Research Institute presents

Algorithmic Enlightenment?

A Computational Approach to Literary Periodization

Professor Matthew Erlin
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4:00pm
Burrowes 430

In addition to writing two important books on urbanism and consumer culture in the eighteenth century, Professor Erlin organized the conference on Distant Readings/Descriptive Turns at Washington University in April 2012.

He is currently working on *Rethinking the History of Literature 1731-1864: A Statistical Approach*

A digital humanities project that uses probabilistic topic modeling to test a set of longstanding assumptions about the periodization of literary history. Applying the MALLET topic modeling toolkit to a data set of 154 novels written between 1731 and 1864, he evaluates whether these novels do in fact cluster together so as to support the scholarly consensus on periodization. Are there hidden thematic structures in these works that point to new ways of thinking about proximity between texts?