Hi, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to The Thought Project recorded at the Graduate Center of The City University of New York, fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences, and sciences. In this space we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting edge research informing New Yorkers and the world.

This week's guest Matt Gold, is an associate professor of English and digital humanities at the Graduate Center where he holds teaching appointments in the Ph.D. program in English, the MA program in Liberal Studies, and the Doctoral Certificate programs in Interactive Technology and Pedagogy and American studies. He serves as an advisor to the provost for digital initiatives, director of the Cuny Academic Commons, co-director of the Cuny Digital Humanities Initiative and director of the GC Digital Scholarship Lab, as well as the director of the GC Digital Fellows Program.

In all of these roles Matt works to integrate digital tools and methods into the core research and teaching missions of the Graduate Center. That's a big job, welcome Matt.

Thank you very much, I'm delighted to be here.

As our listeners can tell by your introduction, you are all things digital at the Graduate Center. Can you tell us about these programs and initiatives and what is going on at the Graduate Center in this new world that is integrated across the Academy.

That's a great question and I'm happy to say that there is a great deal going on at the Graduate Center in these areas. As you point out, technology is becoming part of our common practice of research, it's becoming part of how we teach. We are often using digital platforms to reach our students and increasingly to share our work and do our research.

So for a space like the Graduate Center, an institution like the Graduate Center, the question becomes what do doctoral and masters students needs to know about knowledge and digital spaces, about how to use digital methods in their own work and about how to communicate their research through digital platforms, in order to, I would say take an approach to scholarship that takes digital methods into account. But also does so in a critical way, in a reflexive way that, for instance doesn't embrace technology in a kind of techno-utopian way. But rather thinks about the limitations of digital platforms. In some ways the dangers of digital platforms, but also how digital methods and tools can change in some pretty fundamental ways, the way we think about the work we do.

And I would say, ultimately, what we are trying to do at the Graduate Center is to think about how technology can help us ask new questions. So that ideally these digital tools and platforms add a new critical lens to our work that we can think through.

You've really been deeply involved in building the institutional frameworks at the Graduate Center in supporting digital humanities development in the past several years.
So tell us about that research, and maybe even your own, so that we can illustrate what we are talking about.

Matt: Sure. I would point to a couple of things. The first way that I kind of began using digital methods was really in my teaching. I received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a program called, Looking for Whitman, that involved students from multiple campuses who lived in places where the poet, Walt Whitman, had lived and written. All studying the works that were written in those spaces and the particular parts of his career where they were.

Matt: So what that project did was to use pedagogical platform as a common space for multiple classes and multiple places to bring the work of Whitman together and to create a kind of tapestry of his career through place based exploration.

Matt: But as my career has developed I've been working a lot on thinking about how digital platforms can connect scholars and how scholarly communication itself has been changing. So some of my projects like the Cuny Academic Commons create a platform for the 24 campus Cuny system where faculty, students and staff can communicate with one another and share their research.

Matt: But I've also been working with the University of Minnesota press on a Mellon Foundation sponsored project called Manifold Scholarship. That is looking about new forms of publication, new forms of publishing and how scholars can share their work. Not just in print, but also on the web, and I would just say that we're very interested in that kind of hybrid approach. The idea isn't that we're jettisoning print, because we love to read, my bookshelves are filled with print books. But we also want to explore digital platforms who have publication.

Tanya: Yes, you've given a number of interviews about what does a university press look like in the 21st Century with this digital framework. Is it not ... not only the press, but the way we learn, the way we teach, the way that we share research, is this not a revolutionary moment in the academy when we're integrating these digital tools and approach to analyzing problems, or even attempting to raise and answer a research question.

Matt: Yes, things are absolutely changing. Sometimes in a more evolutionary way, in a kind of slower way than we might hope for. But I would say that the changes might be grouped into a couple of different categories. One is that scholarship is more often networked than it used to be. What I mean by that is that scholars and researchers are sharing their works in the spaces of social networks.

Matt: So for instance, you might find a scholar tweeting about a visit to the archive, or tweeting about a new thought or discovery, or tweeting at an academic conference or writing on Facebook.

Matt: What happens when researchers do that is that they are at once kind of amplifying their work in the public sphere so that people who might not have been aware of academic research on the subject are able to run across it. But they're also bringing it to public
view at an earlier stage than they might have in the past. And that leads me to the second way in which research is really changing, which is that it is more often becoming iterative.

Matt: Both of these principles, networked and iterative are what have really animated our manifold scholarship project. Scholars are more and more often sharing proto versions of their research. Sharing work at an earlier draft stage than they might have. And even changing the process of peer review.

Matt: Peer review traditionally uses double blind peer review where a scholar writes an essay, it goes out to a reviewer, the name of the scholar is removed and the name of the reviewer is removed and then it gets peer reviewed. More and more what's happening is that those kind of review processes are either being replaced by, or being combined with public peer to peer reviews.

Matt: So that for instance, a scholar in digital humanities might share an essay and it might appear on a platform where other scholars are able to comment in the sidebar, raise issues with what's been written, suggest other resources, respond to the work. That gets the work out there at an earlier stage. It also means that the work is co-developed within a community of researchers, rather than being the work of a single researcher.

Tanya: Yeah, it's much less solitary now. I, for example, just last night, I can share this. I posted a picture of President Nixon and Marshal Tito in 1970, which is now part of my research and I was getting live feedback from people on Facebook, raising things that maybe I wouldn't even think about. It's a very interesting way to develop research. All of us can point to these examples and not really think about. But it never happened before the arrival of the internet.

Matt: Another example, I've been working as one of a set of general editors on a publication called Digital Pedagogy in the Humanities, which is being published by the Modern Language Association. That project from its very instantiation has been public. The way that project is organized, we take 60 key words of digital pedagogy and each one is assigned to a curator who is trying to bring together examples that exemplify that key word.

Matt: For example for the keyword mapping, the curator will go out and find ten pedagogical assignments or syllabi or resources, that might be used by someone who wanted to teach mapping. What we've done is we've shared the entire project from the very beginning on GitHub, we've done many stages of the editorial review and the peer review out in the public. So what that means is that project has not yet been published, and I'm using air quotes there. But it is available.

Matt: Just yesterday I heard from a scholar, a librarian at University of Victoria who is using that publication and was so excited about that the resource was available. In some ways the internet is helping us get academic work out much more quickly and to make it much networked and robust.
Tanya: The social science indicates, and this is with my communications hat, that now journal articles that used to sit in libraries on shelves collecting dust are not only digitally published, but people are sending out the links through their twitter feeds and on Facebook and whatever other social media platforms. Now the general public is getting access to research that never happened before.

Matt: Exactly, and I would just say that this is part of what we're teaching our graduate students here about, because as you can imagine, it can be a little nerve wracking, especially if you're a younger scholar or a graduate student, to begin sharing your work. Traditionally in graduate school ... the entire pressure of graduate school is often to keep closed and hidden the work that's going on until it's ready or polished and ready to be published, so this is really an inversion of many fundamental conventions within scholarly publishing and here at the Graduate Center we're working with our graduate students to give them the tools to create their scholarly personas on the web and social networks, and to do so in really thoughtful ways.

Tanya: Following up on that, now the Graduate Center has launched a new masters program in digital humanities and, I want to ask you and I'm sure our listeners want to know, what can a student do with this degree? And given your scholarship on digital humanities, what would you say to that prospective student who would be learning at a cutting edge academic institution like the Graduate Center in the emerging field of study.

Matt: We're so excited to launch this program, which really builds out of all the work we're doing. One thing I would say at the outset is that one of the strongest things we offer prospective students is an active community of practice. So when students come here to do the masters in digital humanities, they're not off in a corner somewhere. They're part of a large set of students and faculty and staff who are actively working on these issues and kind of working on them together in collaborative ways. I think that's, to me, one of the things that really makes this program distinctive.

Matt: Another thing is that we are in New York and that's an amazing thing for us, because the digital humanities really works with material and data from the cultural heritage sector, from the arts. One of our faculty members, for instance, has worked with the Museum of Modern Arts photography collection in digital form. That can be a data set. There's all kinds of data that we are excited to work with cultural institutions in New York to think through their data.

Matt: But I would say in terms of your question about what students can do with the degree and why they might consider coming here. We think the program will appeal to different types of students. Some students may be interested in moving on to doctoral programs, and a program like the MA in digital humanities can really give the student a grounding in digital methods, but also because our masters students can take classes in our doctoral programs, a grounding within humanistic or social science subjects.

Matt: The second thing I think that our students can do is they can go to work within the cultural heritage sector, the arts sector, the non profit sector. So many of students will
come here, will learn skills ... the three kinds of areas we have in the program are digital pedagogy, digital textuality and then data visualization and mapping.

Matt: There are different ways each of those areas could potentially play out within different sectors, but we are thinking, for instance, the skills that a student might learn in data visualization could be useful to someone at a non profit trying to visualize data from that non profit. Or to someone in the arts sector who's trying to think through data from the arts sector.

Tanya: In that vein, we are also offering a new masters in data analysis and visualization and you've already mentioned some of the work that Lev Manovich did with MoMA and of course his work has been highly visible and global. This production of data, massive data, big data and the curation of and analysis and visualization is really ... you know, we've been talking about how it's changing research. This is an exciting masters, I would think that there's a lot of people who would be interested in this field of study, because it has so much applied use. Utilization.

Matt: Absolutely and I think one of the things that makes the MS in data analysis and visualization distinctive is that we often, visualization techniques, design and data and cultural studies are all taught separately and one of the things this program does, it brings all those things together.

Matt: In addition to thinking about the technical ways in which data can be cleaned, can be prepared for presentation, can be visualized in different ways, we are also going to be teaching students about the design of data visualization. Also what are the cultural implications of this, what are the critical data studies, issues we need to think about, as we think about data in general.

Matt: It really combines the critical hands on study of technical systems for data visualization with some areas of graphic design and then also a data studies perspective as well.

Tanya: Thanks very much for being with us today Matt.

Matt: Thank you so much for having me.

Tanya: Thanks for tuning in to the Thought Project and thanks to today's guest Professor Matt Gold.

Tanya: The Thought Project was produced in partnership with Cuny TV, located at the Graduate Center at the heart of New York City. With production, engineering and technical assistance by Sarah Fishman and Jack Horowitz. I'm Tanya Domi, tune in next week.