BRUCE COLE

MR. COLE: Well, good morning, buon giorno. Welcome to the Old Post Office, home of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I'm really delighted that all of you could join us today for the conference, "Using New Technologies to Explore Cultural Heritage. It's especially appropriate that we're bringing Italians and Americans together today as Columbus Day nears.

I want to begin by thanking His Excellency Ambassador Giovanni Castellaneta and the Italian embassy for that wonderful reception and opening ceremony last night. I hope everybody had fun, I thought Steven Johnson did a terrific job.

And I also want to recognize my friend, Professor Roberto de Mattei and the entire staff of the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, especially Virginia Coda Nunziante, as well as the NEH staff, all the NEH staffers who worked so hard to make this a reality. And I'm very pleased about the collaboration between our two agencies. Also I want to single out our NEH ambassador to Italy, Michael McDonald, who worked tirelessly to make this all happen.

Finally, the NEH and the CNR both wish to thank the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities for its generous support and for its leadership under Adair Margo and its executive director Henry Moran. I'm not sure if Henry is here today.

This past summer, the NEH was honored to sign a memorandum of agreement with the CNR to encourage the exchange of information and scholarly research in the humanities between our two nations. Today's conference is the first tangible result of that agreement.

I'm confident that this is just the start of a very long and fruitful relation between our two agencies. This collaboration will continue next spring in Rome when the CNR will host the second conference, and that's the hardship part of this for us.

(Laughter)

MR. COLE: Today, we have brought together an outstanding group of scholars and technology experts from Italy and the United States. They are here to shed new light on a vital topic: how we can use digital tools to better understand ourselves, our history, and our cultural heritage.

Digital technology is transforming the way that scholars research, archive, and present the humanities. And the NEH is leading the exploration in this country of that new frontier, through our Digital Humanities Initiative, or DHI, which we launched just last year.

And here I have to give kudos to Brett Bobley sitting to my left, who I always call our "Digital Czar". Brett has really made this a reality in the shortest -- in the shortest of time. So thank you, Brett.

Under DHI we have two broad goals. The first goal is to help build a humanities cyber infrastructure. This includes the basic infrastructure of digital tools, databases and other products that can be used for humanities research, programming and preservation.

It also includes the human infrastructure of digital humanities centers and other groups that will bring humanities scholars together with computer scientists, engineers, and others. The NEH is pursuing this goal through many new grant programs we have begun under DHI, such as our Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants and Challenge Grants.

The second part of DHI is to promote collaboration across the boundaries of academic disciplines, as well as between funding agencies and indeed between nations, which brings us back to this conference. To achieve the great potential that the digital humanities offer, we must seek and share the best ideas and practices in the field, whether they come from our own neighborhood or from around the globe.

Today's conference participants are doing some of the best and most exciting work in the area of the digital humanities -- everything from digital-based virtual reconstruction of ancient monuments and cities, to the application of computing in fields like literature and philology.

We are honored to have gathered such a distinguished group. And I look forward to the stimulating ideas and discussions they will present for us today. Now, it's my pleasure to introduce our moderator for today's conference, Mr. Brett Bobley. Brett.