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DIGHUM 101

**Data in the Humanities: Interpreting the Humanities in a Digital World**

One of the central challenges the Digital Humanities face is clarifying its relationship with the Humanities itself. The multiple forms and voices that make the humanities so rich also makes it difficult to quantify and digitalize, in spite of the plethora of data it generates. In the view of the scholars considered in this project, previous assumptions about what technology is able to accomplish both guide the use of Big Data by humanists as well as play a role in their critique. However, the critical and cultural awareness that comes with working in humanities disciplines cannot be substituted with the accumulation of mass data and analysis, but must be used in tandem with them.

To better understand the relationship between the humanities and the digital world, it is necessary to recognize the methods and qualities that define data in the humanities. In *What is Data to Humanist*, Owens describes data as “constructed artifacts”, “interpretable text”, and “processable information” asserting that data is “not a kind of evidence” but “a potential source of information that can hold evidentiary value” (Owens, 2011). Throughout his article, Owens emphasizes that interpretive acts are involved in not only how datasets are processed and analyzed but in how they are assembled and constructed. This deliberate focus on the relationship between the accumulation of big data and how the data is interpreted and incorporated into research is a common theme shared by Boyde & Crawford (2012), Grimmer (2015), and Liu,(2011).

The articles also focus on the need for the human element in interpreting data. Specifically, Liu writes that as it expands as a field, the Digital Humanities have neglected to advocate for the humanities itself. The political, social, and economic inquiry is sacrificed for technical development and mass data analysis as the humanities become part of the industries they had historically critiqued. Grimmer highlights this shortcoming when he notes that although Big Data can provide a previously impossible scale to humanities projects, without the creativity, measurement, and research design of social scientists, these projects can become meaningless. Boyde and Crawford align with Grimmer’s conclusions as they note the limits of Big Data’s objectivity and access, as well as its need for humanist context.

These authors are part of the ongoing debate surrounding methodology, interpretation, and scale in digital humanities projects. Liu (2011), remains on the traditional side of the digital humanities spectrum. However, Boyde & Crawford (2012), Grimmer (2015), and Owens (2011), hope for the possibility of Big Data projects as long as they are merged with humanity’s critical thinking and social awareness. Dr. Nan Z. Da’s article, “The Digital Humanities Debacle” aligns with Liu’s (2011), sentiments as she argues Computational Literary Studies needs to satisfy the evaluative criteria of both Literary Studies and quantitative sciences. However, she also shares a belief in the field’s possible contributions that resemble Boyde & Crawford (2012), Grimmer (2015) and Owens’s (2011), if placed under editorial scrutiny. Dr. Nan Z Da is right in asserting that in order for CLS to aid literary scholarship it needs to be designed with the qualitative rigor of a humanist. Although the Digital Humanities present possibilities for data aggregation, collection, and pattern detection, these endeavors need to be informed and built by the critically aware perspective of humanities scholars to produce research that is accurate and contextualized.

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