

# Intersectional Feminist Revolutions in Digital Humanities – approaches, histories, and methods

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## Panel Overview

How has, and how can, intersectional feminist methods, praxis, and theories shape digital humanities? How can we, as a digital humanities community, embrace and embed feminist thinking into our everyday work practices and in the projects we develop and collaborate on? What tools and methods do we need to create more inclusive and socially aware technological infrastructures, systems, and code? These are the questions being asked by 'Full Stack Feminism in Digital Humanities' (FSFDH), a two-year project funded jointly by UK and Irish research councils. Full Stack Feminism (FSF) is akin to Tara McPherson's (2018:27) approach and examination of 'designing for difference'. This includes thinking about and responding to feminist concerns, but also, as Alan Liu (McPherson 2018:28) states, to the 'full register of society, economics, politics, and culture'. FSF is a trans, inter disciplinary research project which develops an intersectional feminist framework for digital arts and humanities (DH) practice and research. The 'Full Stack' metaphor accounts for a commitment to review and critique all stages of the development and data life cycle – from design to implementation, from the processes of datafication to dissemination, critiquing every stack from the code right

through the infrastructure layers above. This panel reflects upon the feminist revolution in digital humanities and of the feminist foundations in DH upon which the project is built.

Digital humanities (DH) have a history of challenging the status quo and of embracing alternative means of knowledge production. As such, the panel explores how intersectional feminism methods and praxis can help to develop a more open, and inclusive, DH. The opportunity for collaboration in this space is vast and beneficiaries broad. This panel, and the project discussed, is therefore a response to the varied calls within DH for more inclusive practices, with broader community engagement across intersectional lines of identity politics. It explores how feminist epistemology, praxis and methods can contribute to shaping DH as an intellectual field which responds to structural inequalities within and beyond its boundaries.

The panel is comprised of members of the FSFDM team and explores the various ways in which the research project collaborates across academic disciplines and different communities of interest. We provide a broad overview of the project and its activities as well as more detailed analysis of feminist approaches to practice-based research methodologies, interview collation, listening, and storytelling, that arise out of our investigations. The panel will explore elements of our FSF framework, which consists of three stacks: (1) data and archives; (2) infrastructure, tools and code; and (3) dissemination, integration and access - specifically explored through Webb, Chevalier and Naji's contributions. From this foundation panel members, Fubara-Manuel and Fox, discuss feminist methodologies and praxis such as critical (con)fabulation and story-telling, both methods of decentring and narratorial recreation or empowerment. Lastly, given the central role of critical digital arts practice within the project, the panel concludes with Hill's reflections on the curatorial role in remaking, or revisioning future heritage.

### Full Stack Histories and Foundations – Sharon Webb

Full Stack Feminism responds to calls across academia and society to rethink the way in which we approach the production, creation, development and roll out of technology. It stems from ongoing collaborations between project partners in Ireland and the UK, and is part of a strategic effort by Irish and UK funding councils for closer co-ordination on Digital Humanities across the two political entities, across political divides. Webb's panel contribution therefore, describes the foundations of the project, acknowledging its roots in feminist revolutions in DH, as well as in the history of feminist interventions across the sub-discipline, Feminist Science and Technology Studies, or STS. As D'Ignazio and Klein (2016) state, feminist STS, which developed in the 1970s and 1980s, 'allows us to see how all knowledge is situated, [and] how certain perspectives are excluded from the current knowledge regime'. FSF takes seriously the history of exclusion from current knowledge regimes, now embedded across our digital knowledge infrastructures, and takes inspiration from bell hooks' (1984) 'from margin to centre' by aspiring to include community voices as a location of expert knowledge within the project. It reflects current work within DH and cognate fields that work to decentre dominant voices and perspectives by embedding intersectional feminist praxis across project life-cycles. Webb's panel contribution will explore the "full stack" metaphor utilised in this project and provide an overview of work within Stack 1: Data and Archives.

### Feminist Building and Listening - Cécile Chevalier

The second panel contribution introduces elements of the work and rationale within stack 2, 'infrastructures, tools and code'. It engages with deconstructing machine learning, and technological eco-systems whilst exploring alternative computational systems as a mean to gain autonomy. Chevalier's presentation explores al-

ternative forms of building, sustainable and autonomous, collective memory and community-led heritage, specifically from marginalized, oppressed, or altogether omitted histories. Collectively, we understand that in the computational autonomy is (im)possible. Autonomy requires a sense of position and orientations, to be able to know where compromise can take place, so one can have the ability shape alternative models and pathways.

Stack 2 recognises the need to return to a human foci and for the basic need of listening to be considered as a necessary tool in navigating inherited and future computational bias. In this respect, Chevalier's panel contribution considers feminist listening as framework for intersectional feminist thinking that is *making trouble* (hooks 1989, Butler 1999, Ahmed 2016); it creates resistance against oppressions related to social identities, and contributes to forms of liberation as becoming a *collectivity of trouble* (Butler 1999, Ahmed 2016). This can be seen as trouble as: a dislodgement of mechanisms of power; social and cultural imaginary to an alternate past, present &/or future; the mobilisation of collective expressions and recognitions. Drawing from concepts of 'freedom of listening' (Lacey, 2013, LaBelle, 2021), feminist listening evokes agency of 'trouble' as a conscious act, that requires shifting acoustic order with orientation and politics of location.

#### Digital Art as a Feminist Interface - Jeneen Naji

The last stack in the FSF framework is concerned with Access, Experience and Integration. Stack 3 can be considered the "front end" and relates to the ways in which digital tools, resources, and 'archives' are accessed and experienced by users, by consumers, by archivists, and ways in which knowledge and digital cultural heritage is accessible or indeed inaccessible. In all cases accessibility in digital archives is mediated through the interface, interfaces matter and are an important entry point into DH for the public. For example, Ruberg et. Al (2018: 110) note that, as feminist scholars they recognise that computational tools are not apolitical, they have an impact, they structure meaning, and visualisations craft interpretation. As such an interface can be seen as a space in which meaningful embodied interaction takes place in a networked environment, or an interface can be seen as a component of a digital work in which case it operates more like an index to specific content (Drucker 2019, 3). Naji's panel contribution as such discusses feminist HCI as a design methodology that seeks to incorporate feminist values such as inclusion, diversity and social justice in the development of interactive media. FSFDH's stack 3 therefore proposes that as per McPherson (2018) the use of feminist HCI methodologies (Bardzell 2010) can make the case for digital art texts to operate as archival interfaces in order to maximise public understanding in DH and create a milieu for intersectional cultural heritage.

#### Critical (Con)Fabulations: Fabricating Other Worlds in the Meantime - Irene Fubara-Manuel

There are gaps in archives that the collection of artefacts will never close without addressing power relations. Power deepens the gaps of the archive through the renarration of stories that then build and mobilise ways of organising the world. Such ways of organising the world are embedded in the design of technologies that continue the cycle of archival violence. The theorist and historian Saidiya Hartman (2008) has posed critical fabulation as a method to test the limits of archives through combining archival renarration with fiction. To critically fabulate is to tell stories from archives in ways that not only address the gaps but also speak truth to power in the present and connect to other futures. Borrowing Hartman's proposed method, Fubara-Manuel's panel contribution considers the opportunities of critical (con)fabulation as an intersectional feminist intervention in digital humanities. It asks what worlds might emanate when those othered through the gaps of the

archive, not only critically confabulate but also collaboratively fabricate technologies that best serve them. Connecting stacks one (digital archives) and two (code and infrastructure) this presentation will flesh out intersectional feminist and queer theories of fabulation. It will then expand on creative practices that implement the methods of critical confabulation.

#### Storytelling as Embodied Knowledge: De-centring Dominant Perspectives in DH - Izzy Fox

Fox's panel contribution explores how research project recognises storytelling as a mode of knowledge production and collaborates with communities traditionally marginalised within DH. This approach is one of the ways in which the project actively serves to decentre dominant perspectives, histories, technologies and practices. The importance of storytelling as a feminist epistemology is also reflected in the findings from interviews with digital practitioners, including artists, archivists, scholars and coders, whose work reflects an intersectional feminist ethos. Furthermore, the interviewees understand that the act of storytelling, through their archival, artistic or scholarly practice, is an embodied endeavour, because: "In the process of storytelling... The speech is seen, heard, smelled, tasted and touched" (Trinh 1989: 121). Archiving oral histories; documenting dance practice; and animating archival artefacts represent some of the ways in which the interviewees foreground embodiment through processes of digitally-mediated storytelling to centre marginalised lives, experiences and knowledges. The interviewees are drawn from community and scholarly contacts, as well as the diasporic connections, of the research team. While the knowledge, or knowledges, of the team is diverse and intersectional, we understand that biases and exclusions may exist due to our own positionality, within academic institutions, living in the UK and Ireland. In this sense, we draw on Donna Haraway's term "situated knowledges" (1988), which recognises that knowledge is shaped by who we are and the contexts in which we exist. Acknowledging this allows us to better understand and respond to the stories retold in our project interviews.

#### Curating an Unsettling: non-human assemblages and future heritages - Laurence Hill

If the work of the project is in part to decentre dominant narratives in the field of DH, the curatorial role requires reflection on the state of the (digital) art. The decentring of the predominantly cis het, male, technocentric and western-oriented epistemologies within which digital art is largely situated invites an alternative curatorial collaboration. This unseating (Preciado 2020: 20) in curatorial practice requires collaboration with a non-human assemblage - a concept in which technology is allied with individuals from groups whose identities have been historically categorised as less than human through frameworks of social and scientific racism, homophobia, transphobia, cissexism, disablism and neurotypicality. The curatorial collaboration with the non-human assemblage does the work of decentring the predominant epistemologies of digital art by 'undoing and unsettling' them, an act of disruption and activism through curatorial practice. As such Hill's panel contributions draws upon the concept of 'undoing and unsettling' from Katherine McKittrick's work about the writer and cultural critic Sylvia Wynter (McKittrick 2015: 2). This 'undoing and unsettling' is generative in reconsidering the frameworks and contexts in which digital art is produced and presented. As FSFDH demonstrates, the market and cultural dominance of a small number of tech companies requires a different approach than overnight coups - it requires acts of undoing and unsettling, of unpicking. If the heritage to come is being written now, the result of this interventive collaboration, which includes curation, is a redoing, a revisioning of a future heritage that is revolutionarily different.

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