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Death of a Discipline

In the decade-plus since the emergence of digital humanities (DH), we have heard a great deal of discussion about the nature of the enterprise. Especially when DH is mentioned in the context of literary studies, one of the first things we hear is the question, "What *is* it?" Typically, responses to this question take what historians of science call an internalist perspective: digital humanists present examples of DH practice in order to demonstrate what DH is or does. I think this is, at least in part, answering a different question from the one being asked. When I listen to the question asked by literary scholars, what I hear is: "How did this practice become part of our profession? What resemblance does it have to the rest of what we do? Why don't I understand better what it is and is supposed to be? Who decided what counts as 'digital' for my discipline?"

Typically, these conversations involve many persons strongly identified with DH and only a few who are not, even when they are, in theory, conversations about the profession of literary research in general. I was thus heartened to hear reports of the "Dark Side of the Digital Humanities" panel at the 2013 MLA, which featured established scholars of both literature and

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the digital for whom "digital humanist" is not the first label that comes to mind, and even happier to be invited to contribute to this special issue of *differences*, a leading journal in literary studies and critical theory and not DH. We literary scholars need to ask more explicitly than we have so far whether and how DH is a part of our discipline. My observation has long been that some DHers are evasive about its definition and goals and that this evasiveness is part of what provokes the ongoing discussion of its nature.[1] Despite its insistence on being only a set of methods, DH can be productively understood as a political intervention within literary studies, one of whose functions is to challenge the authority of "non-DH" literature scholars regarding our own discipline, in particular via a tendentious deployment of both the terms *digital* and *humanities*. As used in the name DH, *digital* is a catachresis because it does not mean the same thing that the word *digital* does in ordinary discourse, including that of "non-DH" literary scholars. *Humanities* is also a catachresis because it resists the necessary location of scholarly discourses within disciplines (that is, unlike a phrase like "interdisciplinary studies," *humanities* suggests that internal divisions between humanities disciplines are dispensable). My analysis is directed not at DHers so much as it is at so-called non-DH literary scholars—thus it appears in a venue of which we are the primary readers—to suggest, first, that scholars of literature have both the right and the responsibility to decide what constitutes not just scholarship but good scholarship in our field (meaning good research and canons of method as well as primary texts); second, that it is plausible to see DH as an attack on precisely these rights and responsibilities; and, finally and especially, that literary scholars need not defer to DHers when deciding what work qualifies as part of our discipline and meets our own disciplinary standards. This is especially important since significant numbers of very active DHers have very distant relationships with the professional worlds of the humanities and of literary studies. For example, and this should in no way be construed as a comment on their value per se, it is odd to note the number of librarians who, by dint of their participation in DH, consider it appropriate to express very strong opinions about professional matters in literary scholarship, especially standards for promotion and tenure, despite library schools not as a rule being institutionally part of the humanities.

The question I am raising here is why professionals who are not humanists should be engaged in setting standards for professional humanists. This question in no way denies the right of new fields to form or for DHers to do research as they please; this is not a critique of stand-alone DH programs. It does, however, raise important issues of faculty governance

when new disciplines take for themselves the same primary topics as do existing fields, and particularly when such new disciplines don't make clear their relationships to the discipline(s) with whose objects of study theirs overlap. And it does challenge the right of DH to say that it eschews the methods, standards, and critical orientation of literary scholarship and simultaneously to declare that its products must be sanctioned by the profession *as* literary scholarship. If DH scholars wish to participate in literary studies, they need to express much more clearly their commitment to existing forms of scholarly practice and their arguments for rejecting them in their own practice.

The advent of DH within literary studies should not be decontextualized, although DH advocates routinely resist such contextualization. The fact is that the humanities academy in the United States has been under attack from a wide range of conservative political forces for decades, particularly under the assumption that the humanities are useless or fail to teach skills necessary for employment. Cultural scholars who have looked at this situation consider it in part a mark of the inherent resistance to market absolutism found in the humanities; sites of resistance to such politics are disappearing, and it is no surprise that those remaining are targets of increased political activity on a number of fronts. It is possible to locate in literary-interpretive practice, including that of the New Critics and their philological predecessors like Erich Auerbach and Leo Spitzer, a generalized ethics of the encounter with the other in language that interpretive humanities offer. While the Right likes to paint such ethics as inherently leftist, a more neutral examination suggests they are compatible with almost any conservative or liberal political philosophy other than market absolutism.

Thus, a notable effect of the advent of DH within English departments has been to limit significantly the presence of active critics of existing politics, including the politics of the digital, within them. Most job advertisements and positions in English that foreground the digital follow the DH lead of stating from the outset a preference for skill-based, project-based practice that does not inherently engage with the rest of literary studies, and much of DH itself begins from a position of "loving the technology" that is much less distanced than the attitude scholars typically take toward their objects of study, regardless of their affective investment in them. In part this is due to the unusual amount of money available to English departments in the form of DH funding (see Columbia, "Definitions"). Concern about the advent of DH need be identified, then, not with the direct implementation of a neoliberal politics, but instead with the displacement of a critical humanities praxis

with one that announces its resistance to interpretation and to engaging with virtually every canon of existing interpretive thought. The question is not whether such practices may be valuable in the abstract; the question is whether it is politically, culturally, and professionally and ethically wise here, now, to endorse them as literary-critical practices.

The Death of the Death of a Discipline

In 2003, at almost the same moment that DH as a label was being launched (see Kirschenbaum, "What Is DH?" and "Tactical Term"), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak published a slim volume called *Death of a Discipline*, her entry in the series of Wellek Library lectures delivered at the University of California, Irvine. Despite a title that might be mistaken as nihilistic, the book is anything but. As Judith Butler writes in a jacket blurb, the book "does not tell us that Comparative Literature is at an end. On the contrary, it charts a demanding and urgent future for the field, laying out the importance of the encounter with area studies and offering a radically ethical framework for the approach to subaltern writing." For me and many of my peers, Spivak is the most important literary scholar of our time. The vision she articulates in *Death of a Discipline* is not just stirring and hopeful, but in 2003, it seemed eminently plausible, even inevitable.

In 2013, it is hard to reconstruct this frame of mind. *Death of a Discipline* describes a future that may never arrive and certainly seems unlikely to come any time soon. *Death of a Discipline* explores how area studies and comparative literature have constructed responses to the end of the Cold War and to "the rising tide of multiculturalism and cultural studies" (1). The vision Spivak specifically articulates is especially sensitive to language: she suggests that we "work to make the traditional linguistic sophistication of Comparative Literature supplement Area Studies" and that "we need to move from Anglophony, Lusophony, Tuetophony, Francophony, et cetera," and instead "take the languages of the Southern Hemisphere as active cultural media rather than as objects of cultural study by the sanctioned ignorance of the metropolitan migrant" (9). A decade later, not only is that project not realized but, if anything, it seems like a considerably more distant goal than it did in 2003. It is this distance that, to my mind, marks the influence of DH, much more than the specific projects and methods to which DH typically points to explain itself. DH as a *politics* has overtaken (though by no means displaced) another, to my mind, much more radical politics, one that promised a remarkable, thoroughgoing, and productive

reconsideration of the foundations of scholarly research but that, crucially, emerged quite directly out of the research practices and protocols that had been developing in literary studies until then. I am not necessarily implying a direct connection between the advent of DH and the relative decline of other projects; but I am suggesting that we need to consider the thesis that the rise of DH and the notable fall of other projects are not simply coincidental.

That there is tension between DH and other modes of contemporary literary study is easily seen on the surface; these tensions are not merely noted but often enough endorsed by DHers themselves. Lisa Spiro writes that "some DH values may clash with the norms of the academy" (30). DH repeatedly suggests that the building of computational tools in itself should qualify as a replacement for scholarly writing, a particularly odd and combative claim in English departments, especially given that fields with direct and extensive investment in digital technology such as computer science and electrical engineering demand written research reports in addition to digital projects. Yet Stephen Ramsay and Geoffrey Rockwell, in "Developing Things," advocate for the replacement of written scholarship with such projects, asking whether "building" is scholarship (83) and answering that it is. But they sidestep the specific questions I am raising here: Is building *literary* scholarship? Why should we *literary* scholars see it as part of our discipline? How does it fulfill the basic goals of *literary* scholarship? One need only examine recent issues of *Profession*, rosters of recent MLA conventions, and articles like Matthew Kirschenbaum's "What Is DH and What's It Doing in English Departments?" to see how prominent critiques of nearly every aspect of literary studies are within DH discourses. DH recommends the demotion of interpretive close reading as the hallmark of literary study, especially in its widespread deployment of "distant reading." Rather than seeking out the marginalized languages of the Southern Hemisphere and elsewhere and engaging the literature produced by their speakers (see Columbia, "Postcolonial"), DH has doubled down on the institutional investment in the world's majority languages (often seeming not even to understand the kinds of problems Spivak raises about these); in important ways, it embraces the idea that literary scholars should be monolingual, although it sometimes ascribes this retrenchment to digital affordances over which it claims to have little control (see Fiormonte). DH tells us, or shows us, that literary research, both in its practice and evaluation, must change. DH says that scholarly publishing and peer review must change, arguing that older forms of scholarship were "locked" within an ivory tower and that its new form of scholarship constitutes a kind of "public

humanities," although a public preference for computationally intensive text processing over close reading of literary texts has yet to be demonstrated. Despite a certain amount of coverage in mass media (which typically includes attacks on interpretive practice under the rubric of "theory"), DH projects appear to attract very little mass attention, whereas the number of "public" literary scholars with significant audiences over the past century is much larger than this formulation suggests. DH says that teaching must change, both in terms of subject matter and teaching method. DH declares that the profession itself must change, advocating "alternative academic" or "alt-ac" careers, particularly within the domain of the MLA, which until very recently was universally understood as the association of professors and apprentice professors of literature.

These perspectives on the profession read to me less like Spivakian rebirth than as an attack on the discipline of literary studies itself. On the one hand, DH tells us, we literary scholars have not earned the expertise to decide what is and is not constitutive of our field; many of us persist in what DH derides as "traditional" research practices and "outdated" models, while the rest of the world, it tells us, has moved on. On the other hand, DH tells us, the practical kinds of expertise DHers have acquired trump the studied expertise of PhDs: that practical expertise, they say, is unassailable and largely unassessable by the rest of us, but it entitles DHers to instruct us in *Profession* and the blogosphere and the MLA Commons and elsewhere regarding what does or what should count in our profession.

A comparison that is often trotted out in these conversations is that the advent of DH is just like the advent of theory: both present orthogonal perspectives with regard to existing methods; and both result in scholars and students appearing to want to teach and to study things very distant from anything one would recognize as literary texts (see, e.g., Kirschenbaum, "What Is DH?"). Yet this comparison reveals more important differences than it does similarities. Theory became part of literary scholarship and the teaching of literature because a great number of respected literary scholars began engaging with it almost immediately and because of the clear conceptual and intellectual connections between the issues raised by these theorists and other concerns of literary critics. By the mid-1970s, just a decade after Derrida delivered "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" at Johns Hopkins in 1966, prominent scholars across the country and in every period and genre were either engaging with "theory" or incorporating theoretical methods and texts directly into their own studies. This is not to deny in any way that poststructuralism was controversial or

to assert that all scholars embraced it; but the fact is that very soon, leading scholars at major colleges and universities were writing in or about it, teaching it, reading it, and thinking about it, and that works by Derrida, de Man, Spivak, and many others began to show up in the bibliographies of scholars working in every period and genre. The same simply cannot be said of DH, particularly of the projects it claims are its methodological heart (see Lunenfeld et al.), such as the generally well-informed topic modeling projects of Andrew Goldstone, Jonathan Goodwin, Ted Underwood, and others, or the Stanford Literary Lab's experiments with automated genre recognition.[2] Despite the radicalism of some forms of theory, it also did not dismiss anything like the number of core professional tenets of literary studies that DH does. This is to speak only of poststructuralist theory, arguably the branch that might appear to outsiders as most distant from "traditional" literary studies; other forms of theory, such as the Birmingham School, feminist and African American studies, and others were developed in the first place in part by prominent literary scholars and immediately incorporated into the practice of many others.

Yet today, more than a decade out from what most acknowledge as the origin of the term *digital humanities*, the number of prominent literary scholars who openly engage with—let alone embrace—its methods and assumptions as direct parts of literary study is vanishingly small. Many of the most prominent DHers appear to have little interest in literary scholarship as others practice it; one of the facts that deserves most sustained attention from literary scholars is the general (though by no means uniform) lack of engagement with non-DH literary scholarship in DH projects. The most widely attended MLA talks typically do not directly engage with DH as a method or with findings from DH scholarship (although they do with increasing frequency discuss DH as a phenomenon), and when they do engage, it is with the writings of DH advocates (such as Matthew Gold's *Debates* volume, Matthew Kirschenbaum's *Mechanisms*, and Ramsay's *Reading Machines*), writings that sit in an uncomfortable disciplinary space between the project-oriented methodology DH claims to advance and the "traditional" written scholarship it claims to have superseded. Further, among the small number of otherwise established literary scholars who do engage with DH scholarship and/or practice DH in one form or another, a sizeable number openly express concern or hesitation about it, either in its specifics or as a general movement. Perhaps most importantly and most clearly, DH scholarship engages little if at all with work considered important by other literary scholars.

Languages, Linguistics, and DH

Some of the ideological weight attached to the presence of DH in literary studies can be most easily seen by drawing a comparison with linguistics. Among all practicing linguists there is clear agreement about the field's main object of study, which is *human language*. To get a PhD in linguistics, a student needs to study one or another aspect of a human language; a *human language* here refers to one of the 6,500 or so languages spoken by a human community in the world today. PhD students are expected to make themselves expert in and ideally speakers of the main language they study in research; that research and teaching will be devoted to one of the particular linguistics subfields, such as phonetics, morphology, or syntax, or computational linguistics.

Just as it has throughout our society, the use of computers in linguistics is widespread and has been profoundly transformational, arguably much more thoroughly than it has been in literary studies, but this has not pulled linguistics away from the study of human languages or instituted a massive rejection of the standards, procedures, and authority of linguistics as a discipline. It would make no sense to talk of *digital linguistics* in any thoroughgoing way because there is almost no linguistics that is not digital today; digital tools are required everywhere in the field, sometimes highlighted, sometimes not. Linguists who insist on the study of human language are not called "traditional," and their object of study is not called "traditional." Attending linguistics conferences, one does not notice dramatic changes in tone and affect (see Grusin) between "digital" and "non-digital" talks. Entirely new subfields of linguistics have developed based almost solely on use of the computer—the broad collection of subfields called computational linguistics, which is itself comprised of more narrow subfields such as machine translation, natural language processing, and corpus linguistics—yet there is no sense of a rupture between these areas and (what is not called "traditional") linguistics; there are even heavily digitized subfields, especially documentary linguistics, that do not go out of their way to emphasize their use of digital tools. The names of these subfields, unlike the name *digital humanities*, clearly and directly specify each area's methodological imperatives. Major journals in the field publish work by linguists who make extensive use of computational methods alongside those who do not. Noncomputational linguists do not think of themselves as "nondigital" and do not continually ask, what computational linguistics *is*—much as, I think, literary scholars would not ask what computational

literary studies is had DH chosen for itself this far more descriptive but less ideologically effective name. Computers are more widely used and of more clear utility within linguistics than they are in literary studies, and yet the field has not experienced the advent of those tools as a direct challenge to any of its fundamental standards or procedures. (Of course, computers raise methodological and theoretical questions, but these are broadly discussed throughout the field, not just among people who build or code.) Yet in literary studies, where the relevance of analytical computational tools remains unclear outside of a very limited domain, our professional journals, websites, and conferences are full of statements to the effect that the discipline must change utterly due to what computers make possible, or, in a less hopeful and less humanistic tone, what computers *require* of us. The reason for this difference, arguably, is just that linguistics as a discipline has not been a hotbed for the kinds of politically inflected interpretive practice that drives right-wing opposition, and the strength of this difference is an index of the ideological pressure that informs DH.

It is worth reflecting, in part because Spivak and Edward Said and other scholars emphasize it so strongly, on the intuitions and practices of DH with regard to language. I suspect anyone who has been close to DH for any length of time has heard the kind of request Kirschenbaum describes in a 2009 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.[3]

> *The English department where I teach, like most which offer the doctorate, requires students to demonstrate proficiency in at least one foreign language. Should a graduate student be allowed to substitute demonstrated proficiency in a computer-programming language instead? [. . .] [I]n my own case, almost a decade ago, I was granted permission to use the computer language Perl in lieu of proficiency in the second of two languages that my department required for the PhD. I successfully made the case that given my interest in the digital humanities, this was far more practical than revisiting my high-school Spanish. ("Hello")*

What should startle linguists, computer scientists, and most literary scholars (at least until recently) is the use of terms like *substitute* and *instead* in this passage, and most especially that they are used with no discussion of whether they invoke valid or accepted disciplinary principles. The fact is that programming *languages* have that name because early developers adopted it as a metaphor; prior to that moment of figuration, they were usually called *codes* (Wikipedia) and were written either in formulas resembling pure

mathematics or nonglyphic forms such as holes in punch cards. The word *language* was applied to these codes for two reasons: first, because developers saw the value of including natural language terms in new higher level codes that could be used by a wide range of people who were not mathematicians and engineers; and second, because the term *language* implied that humans could use the codes in a familiar communicative style, and so the term was thought to be less intimidating than *code*. The fact that a small group of engineers decided to call these codes *programming languages* does not make them into the same thing as human languages, or what have come to be called *natural languages*.[4] Further, no scholar in any of the relevant fields endorses the view that programming languages are, in any sense, the same things as natural languages. Programming languages simply lack many of the essential qualities by which we define natural language (learned informally by children from adults and peers; developed spontaneously; primarily or even exclusively spoken, etc.). Indeed, many computer science doctoral programs continue to require knowledge of one or two foreign languages and do not allow programming languages to be substituted for natural languages. Yet, despite the lack of grounds for the substitution in either field of scholarship to which one might look for it (linguistics for the definition of human language, and computer science for the definition of programming languages), some English professors have taken it upon themselves to declare that programming languages are, for all intents and purposes, the same thing as natural languages and that skill in the former is a reasonable "substitute" for skill in the latter.

Kirschenbaum seems partly aware of this crux, asking, "Was that an equitable substitution, or was I comparing apples and oranges?" He answers:

> *Knowledge of a foreign language is desirable so that a scholar does not have to rely exclusively on existing translations and so that the accuracy of others' translations can be scrutinized. One also learns something about the idiosyncrasies of the English language in the process. A computer language will not replace the comparativist's need to know Spanish or French or German, or the budding medievalist's command of Latin and Greek. But what about the student of contemporary literature interested in, say, electronic poetry or the art of the novel in the information age? Or the student interested in computer-assisted text analysis, who may need to create specialized programs that don't yet exist?*

> *For these students, I believe proficiency in a computer language can fulfill many of the same functions—accessibility, self-reliance, heightened critical awareness—as knowledge of a traditional foreign language.*

As with so much DH advocacy, this passage portrays as obvious fact, without attribution, *ex nihilo* reasoning that directly contradicts the way many and perhaps most other scholars understand a given set of facts, arguments, and history.[5] The primary reason to gain a reading knowledge of a foreign language is to ensure that the scholar can and will read *scholarship* (not primary texts) from *cultures other than her or his own*. The desirability of reading primary texts in the original language, or scrutinizing others' translations, is not the grounds for this requirement—which is of course found in various departments of the university. Reading literature requires much more advanced skill than does roughly parsing scholarship in one's own field in another language; the latter is precisely what the "reading knowledge" of a foreign language is supposed to grant. The justification for this requirement is to decrease scholarly parochialism and to combat the facile tendency to avoid looking outside oneself and one's immediate cohort for confirmation of scholarly findings; it has nothing to do with the direct need of comparativists to have expertise in the languages of the cultures they study. Indeed, that expertise is specific to one's specialization, different in principle from the demand on doctoral candidates not to remain locked in the one culture from which they emerge.

The only people I have ever heard claim that the foreign language requirement exists to foster the kinds of "accessibility, self-reliance, [and] heightened critical awareness" manifested in the mastery of a single programming language are DHers themselves, arguing for this substitution. It is more than a bit ironic that exactly the values I understand to inform the foreign language requirement are directly rejected in the substitution, for it is hard even to suggest that DHers will otherwise not encounter Perl or R in their scholarly work. Further, since some form of programming is often said to be essential to DH, and since most DHers are familiar with programming to some extent, what is being substituted is a formal requirement to do what is already expected, something that will almost certainly not provide a scholarly encounter with the arguments of the "other." My claim is absolutely *not* that DHers should be prevented from or refrain from learning programming languages as a part of their graduate study; it is that this goal and the foreign language requirement have nothing to do with each other

and that the insistence that they do itself reflects ideological and professional commitments that are directly antithetical to literary scholarship as it is understood by nearly everyone outside of DH. It is this gesture and not necessarily the institutional question of whether the substitution should or should not be accepted that interests me. What I have heard again and again in those who recommend the programming language substitution is a disdain for the expertise of literary scholars, their right and responsibility to decide their own professional standards, and a turning away from an encounter with the other that Spivak rightly sees at the conceptual core of literary study as an interpretive, humanistic enterprise.[6]

In *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak puts a particular and repeated emphasis on language study as a hallmark of the expanded field of global literary studies she imagines as a successor to the projects of comparative literature and area studies: the problem with a "combination of Ethnic Studies and Area Studies [is that it] bypasses the literary and the linguistic" (4); "the logical consequences of our loosely defined discipline were, surely, to include the open-ended possibility of studying all literatures, with linguistic rigor and historical savvy" (5); and most crucially, she notes that work with the historically minoritized and ostracized people of the Global South is "generally only possible with the class, physically 'based' in the Global South, increasingly produced by globalization, that is sufficiently out of touch with the idiomaticity of nonhegemonic languages" (10). Again and again, Spivak returns to the question of idiomaticity, noting that to speakers of the familiar and hegemonic metropolitan languages, the thousands of minority and endangered languages in the world are too easily misunderstood as restricted codes, simple translations of concepts without consequence from one setting to another (much as the "if . . . then" constructor in one programming language typically means the same thing as its equivalent in another). Rather, Spivak argues, like the hegemonic languages, *all* human languages are almost pure idiom, always requiring a deep attention to pragmatics and context to understand the often multiple meanings of any utterance. This is part of what makes them so difficult to learn. As we know only too well from English, even the dictionary definition of a term can be completely subverted in what appears to be a straightforward statement, and learning to understand these differences takes a great deal of time. Further, there is no simple test that can be applied to check the accuracy of any particular translation. This stands in stark contrast to the literal nature of programming languages, which exist primarily to be executed by the computer, to be repeatedly tested until they work as desired via execution.

One finds these concerns echoed virtually nowhere in DH. When they are raised, as for example in the Global Outlook::Digital Humanities or DHPoco projects, they appear argumentative and challenging, and they often produce primarily defensive reactions from those most strongly identified with DH. When Alan Liu asks, "Where Is Cultural Criticism in DH?" or Jamie "Skye" Bianco writes that DHers "must seriously question, maybe even interrogate, to use critical terminology, our roles in the legitimization and institutionalization of computational and digital media in the humanistic nodes of the academy and of liberal arts education and not simply defend the legitimacy (or advocate for the 'obvious' supremacy) of computational practices out of a ressentiment-filled righteousness" (100), or when Fred Gibbs asks, "Where is the criticism in DH?" or Natalia Cecire observes that "digital humanities has not done a good job of theorizing either [its own] disciplinary shift or its political implications," the result is not, or at least has not been so far, the scholarly and political interrogation that these writers request. Instead, they are met with more like a grudging admission that there must be something to this increasingly widespread sentiment. But that admission is soon reinterpreted as fear of or resistance to the machine (McCarty) and as a lack of understanding on the part of non-DHers. Implicitly, and sometimes even explicitly, even those of us with technical expertise are portrayed as ignorant and unreflective impediments, despite the fact that it is such critics, not DH advocates, who are explicitly invoking our rich tradition of reflection and self-critical interrogation as essential to literary studies.

The Cyberlibertarian Humanities

I have recently been revisiting the concept of "cyberlibertarianism" as it was articulated by Richard Barbrook and Andy Cameron, Paulina Borsook, and Langdon Winner in the late 1990s and early 2000s and that has more recently been embraced to some extent by Fred Turner. The key insight fostered by this term is that the move that Turner calls "from counterculture to cyberculture" becomes a move from left to right—and more insidiously and disturbingly, a way of coopting left impulses for a rightist politics without adherents necessarily even noticing the transition (and while leaving space for wiggle room regarding certain social issues, such as those related to race, gender, and GLBT rights). Among the distinguishing features of this "hacker ethic," noted by Steven Levy as early as 1984 and productively understood as a cyberlibertarian belief system, one notes principles that have become even more pronounced today, including not just "all information should be

free" but also: "access to computers [. . .] should be unlimited and total"; "mistrust authority—promote decentralization"; "[h]ackers should be judged by their hacking, not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race, or position"; and "computers can change your life for the better" (Levy 27–33). In many ways, this set of commitments, especially the insistence that the newly self-authorized are entitled to judge the qualifications of those who acquired skills via formal training and experience, defines what it means to be a DHer, and one's status as a "real" or "inside" DHer can be measured much more accurately by one's adherence to these dogma than by any particular project or accomplishment. What is most troubling about this belief system is that it tracks so easily with the explicit ideology of the hard right in its regard of all forms of interpretive humanistic education as the thing that must be eliminated not just from higher education but from society in general. The experts aren't. Formal education is useless, especially if it isn't skill- and career-based. More doing, less talking. More skills, less reflection. More hack, less yack.[7] It is not simply that DH and cyberlibertarianism look like sympathetic bedfellows; it is that what DH and far-right critics of higher education say about other forms of literary study is largely identical, and the points where they diverge are those on which too much of DH remains silent. To put it as a pointed question: why should the single remaining site of interpretive humanistic education suddenly start disparaging writing, talking, reading, and thinking as the hallmarks of an informed polis?

This embrace of cyberlibertarianism permeates DH, and it is especially prominent among those who resist or altogether reject cultural criticism as it is typically practiced throughout the rest of literary studies. Thus, in a response to the "Dark Side of the Digital Humanities" panel at the 2013 MLA convention, and also to a student blog post suggesting a homology between DH and the political right, Mark McDayter writes that it is "not true that DH is really untheorized." He points to edited volumes such as Matthew Gold's *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, David Berry's *Understanding Digital Humanities*, and Peter Lunenfeld et al.'s *Digital_Humanities* as counterexamples, but he fails to remark on the thin quality of the discussions of theory and theoretical grounding of politics in much of the Gold volume and in the entire Lunenfeld volume compared with similar volumes in other parts of literary studies. Neither does McDayter mention the recurrent strong opposition to existing literary studies in the Lunenfeld volume and in some of the contributions to Gold's *Debates*.[8] "DHers are often, in my view, far too busy being enthusiastic to take the time out to examine the larger political implications of the technology that so enthralls us,"

McDayter rightly observes. "In neglecting to be noisier or more insistent about the ideological assumptions of the field," he writes, "we have allowed ourselves to become, perhaps, silent partners in their endeavor." But it is notable that his strongest examples of critical politics in DH are efforts like those of #TransformDH and Alan Liu in his "Where Is Cultural Criticism" essay, which have raised defensive hackles in the DH world proper. Equally notable is how resistant DH is even to considering the nature of the "ideological assumptions" McDayter identifies here but that even he does not name. My contention is that DH is—implicitly for some of its practioners and explicitly for others—a realization of those ideological assumptions and for that reason cannot incorporate sustained critical self-analysis.

Of particular note is McDayter's gesture toward "the field's ideological preference for open access and open source, its generally copyleft leanings, for instance," as "precisely those which might undercut [the] argument that DH is a congenial home for conservatism." These values are routinely trumpeted and these recommendations quoted uncritically in DH literature via the writings of libertarians and quasi-libertarians like Clay Shirky, Jeff Jarvis, Steven Johnson, Don Tapscott, Yochai Benkler, Jimmy Wales, Eric Raymond, and others. These figures emerge from and often explicitly embrace right rather than left politics. What is unique to DH as a form of literary studies (and different from the presence of conservative factions within literary criticism in the past) is that such rightist politics are advanced as if they are something else, as if they are left or some "third kind" of politics made real by the introduction of new technology but not requiring the kind of detailed critical explication to which literary critics have become accustomed. The paucity of close theoretical discussion of these politics contributes to the appearance of DH as an attack on, rather than an embrace of, many of the scholarly methods and insights of literary studies.[9] This problem is replicated across most of the debates about DH and its politics, and one of the most disheartening facts about it is that the quality of the discussion is very poor: it really does seem that many of the most ardent DHers simply have not engaged (and certainly do not continue to engage, as other literary scholars do) key texts by Butler, Spivak, Henry Louis Gates, Hortense Spillers, Heather Love, Lauren Berlant, Sianne Ngai, and so many others. Thus, when we talk about *race* or *politics* or even *postcoloniality*, we cannot sustain an advanced discussion among scholarly colleagues, but instead find ourselves groping over basics.

Were they more concerned with the problems of ideology and more conscious of its tenacity, DHers might see how uncomfortably close the

doctrine they advocate is to many of the most extreme ideological attacks on higher education mounted the world over by the political right. This is what I find so disturbing about claims like the one by Tom Scheinfeldt that we are in a "post-theoretical age" and that DH augurs "a sunset for ideology, a sunrise for methodology," as if humanists in particular should accept the view that it is possible for the sun of ideology to set, for methodology (especially that which refuses theoretical reflection) to escape ideology, and to know we are in a "fundamentally new cultural situation" that challenges "our traditional methods of studying culture" (Hall 127). Surely the only way to know, especially in a scholarly sense, that our situation is "fundamentally new" is to understand past "situations"; not to start from that knowledge is to accept as given an ideology that is deeply implicated in our existing politics and power structures. Those of us who study ideology as it functions in culture know that one need not overtly embrace rightist politics to sign on inadvertently or unwittingly to their effects; that one's overt political commitments may be irrelevant to one's actual practice, especially if one systematically refuses to interrogate that practice; that ideology functions particularly strongly through what Foucault called "positive power," attraction rather than compulsion; and that in such an attractive mode ideology can "sell" points of view that have been repackaged so as to look, at least on the surface, as if they mean one thing when in fact they mean another. These are insights gleaned over decades in the best scholarship we have of literature and culture. Yet when our DH conversations begin (see Koh and Risam, "Open Thread," for numerous examples), one has to explain, defend, define, and substantiate positions, schools of thought, and ideas that, in any other conversation in the field, would be taken to constitute minimal indications of professional commitment to the discipline.

Crossing Borders

Returning to the question that confronts DH so often: what *is* it? What it is may be in part understood as the name for a means by which a school of thought strategically opposed to interpretation could wrest authority over literary studies, when this could not be accomplished through the usual means of direct, public, intellectual debate. Thus, I agree with Kirschenbaum that the catachresis in the use of the adjective *digital* in the DH name is "tactical" ("Digital"); where we differ, however, is in our assessments of the nature of the strategic goals in the service of which that tactic is being deployed. The strategy of "growing DH" to which Kirschenbaum

repeatedly points cannot be decontextualized from the many other social forces alongside which it exists, putting aside the fact that such contextualizing is a fundamental part of literary interpretation. There was no way, to put it bluntly, to confront directly the work of scholars such as Spivak, Said, Gates, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Homi Bhabha, and Stephen Greenblatt for methodological preeminence in literary studies by engaging their arguments directly; instead, a new label for literary studies was launched, one designed precisely to attract those people who would find the prevailing form of literary studies distasteful without ever having to ask why they may have felt that way. Thus, a principle motivation both for a definition of DH as privileging the most unlikely practices for literary scholars—applying quantitative methods to the interpretation of qualitative texts—and for the refusal to allow digital practices by other literary scholars to be classed as *digital humanities* can be located in this effort to create an outpost of "literary studies" where the majority of literary scholars have little or no authority or influence.

This is no mere cavil about DH; it is to ask why, more than ten years after its advent, we continue to look for transformative possibilities to a subdiscipline that has had by far more money and, arguably, at least as much effort put into it as any other innovation in literary studies and yet has produced very few result that can be seen as influential or transformative with regard to the field as a whole.[10] The retrograde transformation I have described here is not an accident but a primary function of the discourse of DH. Rarely has so much ink been spilled and so much interest directed at an enterprise that not only produces so little of lasting value but itself constantly discards its own work, a fact it typically celebrates rather than worries over (see Nowviskie). We should reflect on the fact that of the tools and methods DH trumpets so prominently, few are part of the digital toolkit of most literary scholars today, while many widely used digital tools in our scholarly toolkit (JSTOR, EEBO, Google, Microsoft Word, the *OED*) do not emerge from DH. Much of DH's influence comes not from such tools and projects, but from books, articles, blog posts, and position statements, all of which look much more like "traditional" scholarship than the rhetoric would suggest and whose relationship to other ongoing conversations in literary studies is often difficult to see.

This essay has an overt goal: to suggest that literary scholars stop deferring to DH to define its relationship to the rest of the field and that we reject its repeated claims to a technologically privileged authority over research, teaching, and professional standards in literary studies. We

should even reject the claim, very often unfounded, that DHers "understand" technology in a way that "non-DHers" do not. We should question more rigorously the role and function of the DH name with regard to the rest of higher education in the humanities. This is not by any means to reject DH as an enterprise, though I continue to believe that the name should be abandoned in favor of one more precisely descriptive of its methodological commitments. It is to insist that literary DH demonstrate its capacity and commitment to contribute to literary studies as a project in the humanities, clarify its relationship to that enterprise and especially to the scholarly practices that define it, or else openly proclaim its rejection of those practices and thus its distance from the discipline itself. My suspicion is that many, probably most, DHers will opt for the former and be more than happy to illuminate the relation of their work to the rest of literary studies. Those who do not will, I hope, continue their scholarly work but will make much clearer their distance from the project we call literary studies.

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Notes

1 See Golumbia, "Two Definitions" and "Definitions That Matter."

2 For topic modeling, see Goldstone and Underwood; Goodwin; Underwood. For the Stanford Literary Lab's automated genre discovery project (which failed to develop a robust enough tool to reach its stated goal), see Allison, Heuser, Jockers, Moretti, and Witmore.

3 For a more recent example, including responses from DHers, see Whittet.

4 See Golumbia, *Cultural Logic*, ch. 4, for an extended discussion.

5 On *ex nihilo* reasoning as a symptom of computationalism in DH, see my *Cultural Logic of Computation*, 105–12.

6 In addition to *Death of a Discipline*, see Spivak's *Aesthetic Education*.

7 See Koh, "More Hack," and comments for an extended discussion of this trope and its role in DH.

8 See Golumbia, "Definitions," "Building," and "*Geschlecht*."

9 An exception is Berry's *Copy, Rip, Burn*.

10 See Juola for an especially revealing account of the lack of influence of DH projects over the rest of literary studies.

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