This Digital Humanities Which Is Not One

JAMIE "SKYE" BIANCO

Aggression

> Cultural Studies . . . ephemera. Irrelevant.
>
> Critical theory, I mean, let's be honest, what did it ever do politically?
>
> While historians continued to ponder the pros and cons of quantitative methods and while the profession increasingly turned to cultural studies, or took the "linguistic turn," as some have called the move toward the textual and French theory, computer scientists were hammering out a common language for shared files over the Internet.

I offer these three quotations in order to frame a set of problems; and, to be clear, the authors of these three synecdochal snippets do not share much in common beyond a particular advocacy for what is now ubiquitously termed *the* digital humanities.[1]

The first citation, taken from an informal conversation with a senior colleague who self-defines as a computational humanist within a literary specialization, marks what might be thought of as two mutated legacies reemerging in contemporary digital humanities discourse: first, a tendency to treat cultural objects as enclosed, rational systems that may be fully transcoded computationally and, second, an *old* humanist tendency to claim the irrelevance and disavow the privilege of position and deterministic stratifications, which are lived by those outside a centrifugal or privileged referent through a variety of identity-based isms marking the leverage of political, economic, and social power relations. We might think of this twofold movement as an echo of T. S. Eliot's advocacy of "a continual extinction of personality [by the artist]" such that "in this depersonalization . . . art may be said to approach the condition of [so-called objective] science" ("Tradition and the Individual Talent," 10).[2]

The second quotation, more of a digital humanities inflected echo (of the Jacques Derrida, François Cussett, and Stanley Fish circuit[3]) than a statement of invention, was spoken informally in a group discussing methodology. The conversation focused on the inadequacy of print-based critical methods in the wake of informatically and computationally informed practices.[4] I share a sense of the complex limitations of the critical enterprise; and, while I find myself often describing why I feel, as Bruno Latour phrases it, "critique [has] run out of steam," it is rather surprising to repeatedly encounter the assertion that critique (often framed in a denigrated reference to "French theory") ran on a historical rail of impotence and trivialized academic navel gazing rather than running across a historically situated duration that has since changed nontrivially.

The third quotation, taken from William G. Thomas II's "Computing and the Historical Imagination," was published in the well-known, early collection *A Companion to Digital Humanities* (edited by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth) that, as the origin story is told, gave *the* digital humanities, our computational Adam, *his* name. What Thomas offers in this foundational, tripartite narrative is a history of recent academic history, locating together the segregated emergence of quantitative analysis, cultural studies, and the linguistic turn with the development (by computer scientists) of the Internet. He goes on to infer a clear, if not genetic, relationship between the quantitative analysis (performed with computers) in the computational humanities and the computational work that made the Internet. Thomas includes the narrative of Vannevar Bush's vision of the memex, essentially an imagined apparatus for archiving and data mining, but he does not point to Tim Berners-Lee's vision of a web of shared knowledge, culture and semantic content, which might reassemble the collective emergence of quantitative analysis, cultural studies, "the linguistic turn," and computational networks.

Ethos and Difference

Taken together, what constellations of politics are emerging through the digital humanities? And while one might legitimately ask whether the digital humanities has any acknowledged politics, I would specify my usage of the term. By the word "politics," I am asking what power relations have emerged. And because the digital humanities operates through a web of politics, people, institutions, and technics in a network of uneven, albeit ubiquitous, relations, perhaps the question might be more accurately framed as one of ethics. Does the digital humanities need an ethology or an ethical turn? Simply put, yes.

The three anecdotal moments at the head of this essay are meant to point to unsettling substrates growing in the debates of a set of fields that, until a year or two ago, were known by many names, sub- and extra-academic and disciplinary practices. What quick, concatenating, and centrifugal forces have so quickly rendered the many under the name of one, *the* digital humanities? What's in this name, its

histories, legacies, and privileged modalities that assert centrality over and against differentials? Digital and multimodal compositionists, digital and new media producers, game designers, electronic literati, visual and screen studies, and theorists of any sort (French, Italian, or cosmopolite): what sort of bastards or stepchildren have we become under this nomos? And this is a grouping merely predicated on professional difference, because at the heart of the three citations I quote at the head of this essay lies an uneasy, if not abject, relationship to difference. The title of my essay, as I hope many readers will know, refers to Luce Irigaray's famous feminist essay and book, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, wherein "one" is defined as "the universal standard and privileged form in our systems of representation, oneness expresses the requirements for unitary representations of signification and identity. Within such a system, in which the masculine standard takes itself as a universal, it would be impossible to represent the duality or plurality of the female [or any other] sex" (Irigarary, 221).

It's been a long time since I've quoted a feminist like a sledgehammer, but something about the new, posttheoretical humanities, the digital humanities, smells a bit like its self- (and other-) enlightened, progress-driven, classifying, rationalizing, and disciplining (grand)father.

I feel deep political, intellectual, and pedagogical concern regarding current dominant narratives and dialogues circulating not just through problematic historical frameworks but also around the need to establish identity in order to blueprint the future of the digital humanities. The Tunisian uprising made for the first true Twitter or Internet revolution, true only in the sense that the events were socially mediated from Tunisia, assisting the actions of a people who changed a localized political situation. At the very same moment, the Twitter stream emerging from a panel focusing on the future of the digital humanities at the Modern Language Association (MLA) predominantly voiced concerns about "who's in and who's out" of the digital humanities as well as discussions of an emergent academic star network from within the field.[5] More historically framed, the contemporary drift of noncontent and nonproject-based discussions in the digital humanities often echoes the affective techno-euphoria of the libertarian (white, masculinist, meritocratic) tech boom in the 1990s with its myopic focus on tools and technicity and whose rhetorical self-positioning is expressed as that of a deserving but neglected community finally rising up to their properly privileged social and professional prestige. Unrecognized privilege? From this position, no giant leap of logic is required to understand the allergic aversion to cultural studies and critical theory that has been circulating. It's time for a discussion of the politics and particularly the ethics of the digital humanities as a set of relationships and practices within and outside of institutional structures.

The Call

Over and again, we hear an informal refrain, "The people in digital humanities are so nice!" Tom Scheinfeldt makes this assertion point blank in his blog post "Why

Digital Humanities is 'Nice'": "Digital humanities is nice because we're often more concerned with method than we are with theory. Why should a focus on method make us nice? Because methodological debates are often more easily resolved than theoretical ones." I'm not sure I follow the logic of the conclusion here, as "easily resolved" debates could just as easily point to uneven power relations or to passive aggression as much as to niceness. And putting aside the implication that methods and theory are separable, the questionable status of self-description, the socio-psychological implications of conflict avoidance, and the values of "niceness" and its "niceties" in global-knowledge work and the digital economies through which we circulate, we must ask ourselves what sort of social narrative is this—one that smoothes out potential social differences before conflict sets in? Is this the substrate for our ethics and for a theorization of the social? Who does it include and what (self- and other-) disciplines must we practice and propagate?[6]

In fact, from my experience, when issues of social, cultural, political, and theoretical origin are raised in discussions of the digital humanities among self-identified digital humanists, several versions of the same response consistently occur, and none of them is "nice." Responses range from hostility to defensiveness to utter dismissal to an accusatory mimicry of a grossly oversimplified understanding of Big Theory, as the phrase "the linguistic turn" and the lack of reference to theory as social, cultural, or political alludes. This set of responses redounds with a trumpeted faith in technocratic and instrumental means through which the digital humanities (DH) will serve up technocratic and instrumental solutions. Boiled down blithely, the theory is in the tool, and we code tools. Clearly, this position never refers to Audre Lorde's famous essays on tools nor to "the uses of anger," but it does summon their politics ("The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" and "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," in Lorde, *Sister Outsider and Other Essays*). Let me be clear: I am a digital/multimodal compositionist, a digital media practitioner, a feminist, and a critical media theorist whose ethics lie in progressive affiliation and collaborative social justice. This is not a rant against the machine or the tool. This is a rant against the resurgence of an old humanist theme, "Man and His Tool(s)." Tools don't reflect upon their own making, use, or circulation or upon the constraints under which their constitution becomes legible, much less attractive to funding. They certainly cannot account for their circulations and relations, the discourses and epistemic constellations in which they resonate. They cannot take responsibility for the social relations they inflect or control. Nor do they explain why only 10 percent of today's computer science majors are women, a huge drop from 39 percent in 1984 (Stross), and 87 percent of Wikipedia editors—that would be the first-tier online resource for information after a Google search—are men (Wikimedia). Tools may track and compile data around these questions, visualize and configure it through interactive interfaces and porous databases, but what then? What do *we do* with the data?

Digital humanists 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 in liberal arts education and not simply defend the legitimacy (or advocate for the "obvious" supremacy) of computational practices out of a ressentiment-filled righteousness that crudely tends toward a technicist culture and jockeys for position in this climate of growing institutional clout. After all, aren't critical and analytical modes of knowledge production and reception a methodological cache and database, elaborated by technological and techno-scientific practices, and one that might lend some sense of ethical direction for reinvestment in the word "humanities"? Or are the humanities in our title simply the catchall historical referent for our objects of interest and the digital simply the instrumental application that now zeros (and ones) out all previous modes of application?

Again, let me say, this is not a rant against code or computation. I believe and teach that learning to code is an essential and fundamental practice of literacy in our culture, but one among many critical literacy practices. This is a rant against the wielding of computation and code as instrumental, socially neutral or benevolent, and theoretically and politically transparent, not to mention its role in the sequel to "DH Is So Nice," the newly authored farce "The Humanist Geeks' Revenge." In this story, code circulates as the new secret password that allows its bearers to gain entry into what has been consistently and grotesquely referred to as "the cool kids' table" occupied by digital humanists.[7] Is this field actually constructing itself through the competing narratives of privileged, middle-class, white, high-school politics in tension with privileged, middle-class, white people who work "nicely" together? Let me simply suggest that factoring recent events involving social and networked media, social and corporeal violence, bodies, collaboration, and asymmetrical power relations in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Syria, and Pakistan (and these are just a few recent headlines) into the discussions of DH, sociality, ethics, theory, and practices might afford a valuable shift in current perspectives (and on the topic of navel gazing) in the digital humanities.

Where Do You Want to Go Today?

> If code and software are to become objects of research for the humanities and social sciences, including philosophy, we will need to grasp both the ontic and ontological dimensions of computer code. Broadly speaking, then, this paper suggests that we take a philosophical approach to the subject of computer code, paying attention to the wider aspects of code and software, and connecting them to the materiality of this growing digital world. With this in mind, the question of code becomes central to understanding in the digital humanities, and serves as a condition of possibility for the many computational forms that mediate out experience of contemporary culture and society. (Berry)

As Berry's conclusion points out, "we will need to grasp both the ontic and ontological dimensions of computer code," and so we must ask, how might we do this? How might we suss out the qualities and materialities of code, from the most primitive to compiled and networked deployments? And to Berry's assertion, I would add the essential follow-up question, how might we grasp the ontic and ontological dimensions of relational and affective embodiment—human and nonhuman, animate and nonanimate—in a networked, computational, and codified milieu? Recently, we've seen a winnowing of what was an experimental and heterogeneous emergence of computational and digital practices, teaching and theorization from within and across disciplines to an increasingly narrow, highly technical, and powerful set of conservative and constrained areas and modes of digital research. In "Reckoning with Standards," in *Standards and Their Stories: How Quantifying, Classifying, and Formalizing Practices Shape Everyday Life*, Martha Lampland and Susan Leigh Star write of this capacity for constraining standards to "embody ethics and values" such that "to standardize an action, process, or thing means, at some level to screen out unlimited diversity. At times, it may mean to screen out even limited diversity" (8). They go on to discuss how these standardizations can be linked to "economic assessments" (8). This overcoding and compression of protofields and specific computational practices into the field of the digital humanities is directly linked to the institutional funding that privileges canonical literary and historiographic objects and narratives. These disciplinarily legible projects garner high exposure and at times media coverage, presenting a justification for the field based on its kinship to much older modes of humanistic study than those from which we have most recently "posted" and harking back to the study of high literature or true (mapable, visualized data) histories, narratives of enlightenment wiped clean of their problematic grounds. This is a turn back to an older humanism, a retro-humanism, one that preceded work in the humanities and social sciences of the last fifty-odd years and that expanded its ethics and methods to include cultural and critical critique; political, institutional, and governmental analyses; feminism, critical race, postcolonial, queer, and affect studies; biopolitics; critical science and technology studies; experimental methodologies; social theory; and, certainly, philosophical inquiry into the ontic and ontological. New methods, tools, technics, and approaches—Moretti's "distant reading," for example—have been welcome evolutions with provocative expository and critical value, but these additions to the humanities need not mean distant ethics and a severing off of critique and cultural studies. It need not mean that any of these modes will operate as they have in earlier historical moments, either. Our material and historical circumstances change.

Fortunately, we are not required to choose between the philosophical, critical, cultural, and computational; we *are* required to integrate and to experiment. And this analysis and integration need also include the widening schism and reimposition of hierarchies growing between research and teaching institutions and

analogically between research and pedagogy. The heterogeneous constituencies of the digital humanities still have such tremendous opportunities to open up research modes, methods, practices, objects, narratives, locations of expertise, learning and teaching, the academy, the "crisis" in liberal arts education, and the ethics through which we engage knowledge practices at work in a global context. This is not a moment to abdicate the political, social, cultural, and philosophical, but rather one for an open discussion of their inclusion in the ethology and methods of the digital humanities.

Creative Critique: Making Digital Research, One Experiment with Method

Rather than continue this aggressive bent, or what I think of as the negativity of critique, I would like to offer a theoretically informed experimentation with method that I am pursuing that aims at a generative constellation of critique, cultural studies, literacy, pedagogy, affect, and digital computation. Context is a difference engine, especially if the work is humanistic. Sharon Daniel, activist and tactical media artist, makes this case well:

> I refuse to stand outside the context I provide. As a context provider, I am more immigrant than ethnographer, crossing over from the objective to the subjective, from the theoretical to the anecdotal, from authority . . . to unauthorized alien. As an academic I was once reluctant to include my own story when theorizing my work. But my position is not neutral; in theory or in practice, that would be an impossible place. So I have crossed over into . . . "the anecdotal," where theorizing and storytelling, together, constitute an intervention and a refusal to accept reality as it is. By employing a polyphony of voices, including my own, in order to challenge audiences to rethink the paradoxes of social exclusion that attend the lives of those who suffer from poverty, racism, and addiction, my work fulfills the role that new media documentary practices [must play]— . . . context provision. (159)

This manifesto is an attempt at an ethical relationality that underwrites the design and implementation of Sharon's technological work (from the user interface to the database). But she also calls for an affective mode of composing, the drive to produce sensations, feelings, context, and movement. The theory, design, and implementation of her work are also aesthetic relationalities derived from what I see, along with Bruno Latour, as the necessity to construct, to *make* a felt and critical mode of thinking, an open and affective intervention that, while circuiting through tracks of lived and theoretical violence, does not enact them. The construction of context as an affective interaction and circuit is what I refer to as composing creative critical media: a performative interaction, composed affectively through the production of discursive and extradiscursive sensations in order to effect a synaesthetic

rhetoric—felt, seen, and heard—that forges ethical relations out of the captured, inventoried, and composed remains or ruins of injustice, harm, violence, and devastation, out of the social and political conditions in which we find ourselves. When this affective design works, it is creative and critical, rhetorical and aesthetic, embodied and virtual, activating and meaning filled, fully social, ethical and political. But this is a later stage of the process. Let me slow down.

Let's begin again with this funny term "creative critique," and I will return to drawing out a reemerging tendency from New Criticism with which I began this essay and from which I understand some of the current intolerance in the digital humanities to cultural studies and critical theory to be predicated. If we have read our T. S. Eliot, we might take the term "creative criticism" to be an oxymoron as we understand the *function* of criticism: "If so large a part of creation is really criticism, is not a large part of what is called 'critical writing' really creative? If so, is there not creative criticism in the ordinary sense? The answer seems to be, that there is no equation I have assumed as axiomatic that a creation, a work of art, is autotelic; and that criticism, by definition, is *about* something other than itself. Hence you cannot fuse creation with criticism as you can fuse criticism with creation" ("The Function of Criticism, [1923]"). Eliot's distinction between creation and criticism is predicated on a compositional response (as opposed to, say, reception or delivery) and the unidirectional *functionality* of criticism toward a given "creation," or aesthetic object. This distinction correlates to the contemporary role of digital "tools" in relation to humanistic objects of study. Tools are also *about* something other than themselves. Eliot is, of course, responding to an ongoing debate that, as we know, tracks back to the ancients and certainly to the Aristotelian separation of the poetics from rhetoric, technē from *physis*. At this moment, though, the New Criticism is finding its legs in an instrumentalization of criticism, a scientification of the methods and analog codifications and classifications of humanistic inquiry. This separation of criticism from its objects, its one-way functionality, and the invention of New Critical vocabulary understood as a set of tools has continued to enjoy long-lived deployments, long after the turn away from New Criticism as interpretive method. Yet there are other histories in this New Critical moment, debates now absent from the dominant canon and archive of literary studies (and recoverable in this instance through my poststructural and theoretical training in genealogical historicism). In 1931, just a few years after Eliot's "The Function of Criticism," J. E. Spingarn, a modernist critic few of us are likely to remember or know, published a collection of essays titled *Creative Criticism and Other Essays* in which he responds directly and indirectly to Eliot's assertion of a distinctive *function* of criticism by shifting the register of Eliot's compositional *about*: "Aesthetics takes me still farther afield into speculations on art and beauty. And so it is with every form of Criticism. Do not deceive yourself. *All criticism tends to shift the interest from the work of art to something else*. The other critics give us history, politics, biography, erudition, metaphysics. As for me, I re-dream the poet's dream. . . . I at least strive to replace one work of art

by another, and art can only find its *alter ego* in art" (7–8, emphasis added). Thus, for Spingarn, objects lead to or associate with other objects such that, rather than objectified classifications, these objects form a *network*, a constellation of aboutness or interobjective referentiality that exceeds their immediate functionality and instrumentality as they become embedded in a nested and generative process of creation. In a direct way, we might understand this critical redreaming, then, as a sort of prototheory of the remix and the mash up—and certainly of digital, multimodal, inventive, creative critique.

However, one extremely significant problem remains if we are to take this strain of academic history as the basis for a contemporary ethos of computational and digital work in the academic humanities. For Eliot and Spingarn, aesthetics and creation emerge from a legacy of beauty, genius, and the sublime, a *high* art, object-centered modernism. And upon the hierarchal politics and social histories from which this understanding of aesthetics dominates New Critical discourse, the divide between criticism and critique emerges. Aesthetics, as associated with beauty and the sublime, has been a naughty word within critique and critical theory for quite some time, specifically after Theodor Adorno's critical work on aestheticism and the culture industry at large: "I constantly attempt to expose the bourgeois philosophy of idealism, which is associated with the concept of aesthetic autonomy" ("Letters to Walter Benjamin"); and, culminating in his famous quotation, "*nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben*" (There can be no poetry after Auschwitz), framed within the *context* of barbarity, from *Cultural Criticism and Society*, 1951. I do not have the luxury here for a full rehearsal of the movements across New Criticism, the Frankfurt School, and poststructuralism. But as computational and digital practitioners, we can no more sit back and enjoy the privileges of *our* technological sublime any more than we can disavow the ontic, political, aesthetic, technical, cultural, and pedagogical constellations constituted through and with computation and digital networks.

Recent work by Jacques Ranciere on aesthetics and critique offers a model for a generative and contextualized approach. The idealized and functionalist aesthetics of the New Critics belong to what Ranciere calls "aesthetic modernity," which relies on a particular regime, one of three that he identifies in *The Politics of Aesthetics*: "The poetic—or representative—regime of the arts [that] breaks away from the ethical regime of images" (20–21). This "ethical regime of images" offers a provocative thought mesh for computational and digital practitioners, one that is, for me, informed by Spinozian ethical relationality and by what Nicholas Bourriaud terms "relational aesthetics" or "the possibility of a relational art (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human *interactions* and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space), [which] points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art" (14, emphasis added). This concept of relations and particularly *interactions*—given the affordances of digital media—posits an opening for rethinking the roles

of critique, cultural studies, and digital and computational practice through any number of digital, creative critical *interactions*.

Toni Ross pushes Bourriaud's somewhat utopian democratic concept of relational aesthetics one step further by insisting that Ranciere's work takes Bourriaud's position farther in that it "conceives of aesthetics beyond the realm of art, as the numerous ways in which a culture or society establishes, coordinates and privileges particular kinds of sensible experience or perception. His 'distribution of the sensible' produces a system of naturalized assumptions about perception based on what is allowed to be 'visible or audible, as well as what can be said, made, or done' within a particular social constellation" (172). Thus, rather than aesthetics rationally locating the innate beauty of a thing, aesthetics works procedurally in the organization of perception as an affective and embodied process. It designs and executes that which can be experienced as synaesthetically (aurally, visibly, and tacitly) legible. To intervene or critique social or political relations means to create work that offers a critical redistribution of the sensible. Representational criticism, such as interpretative analysis, does not address work at the level of ontology, the body, the affective, and the sensible. In order to get to sensation and perception, a more materially robust mode of critique is necessary. Critical theory, understood as materialist critique, offered a political corrective to interpretive criticism by populating psychosocial and political vantage points to include the receptive positions identified (and disidentified) by feminism or critical race studies, for example. But is *receptive* critique, as we understand it to circulate through the domains of cultural studies and critical theory, sufficiently ontological and sensate or sufficiently productive? At this point, no.

Keeping this revised articulation of a critical aesthetics expressed as contextual design to produce a "[re]distribution of the sensible," I want to offer a further expression of the word "critical" as it has come to function in my methodological experiments in multimodal digital production as creative critique. In 2007, Bruno Latour published an essay in *Critical Inquiry* titled "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," in which he begins,

> Wars. So many wars. Wars outside and wars inside. Cultural wars, science wars, and wars against terrorists. Wars against poverty and wars against the poor. Wars against ignorance and wars out of ignorance. My question is simple: Should we be at war, too, we, the scholars, the intellectuals? Is it really our duty to add fresh ruins to fields of ruins? Is it really the task of the humanities to add deconstruction to destructions? More iconoclasm to iconoclasm? What has become of critical spirit? Has it not run out of steam?

Latour's was not the first voice to raise a concern regarding the violence or negativity of receptive, critical methodologies nor to point out that critique does not offer a supplemental practice of construction to deconstruction, an active politics. Moving

toward a method of constructive reception, Eve Sedgwick published *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* in 2003, in which she argues for reparative reading, a mode of generative interpretive reading that was meant to correct the preponderance of paranoid reading and a hermeneutics of suspicion. And while she addresses critical violence and its forcible exposures, her rhetorical tact turns to consider the characteristics and qualities that must be embodied by the receptive, passive audience for such acts: "What is the basis for assuming that it will surprise or disturb, never mind motivate, anyone to learn that a given social manifestation is artificial, self-contradictory, imitative, phantasmatic, or even violent? . . . How television-starved would someone have to be to find it shocking that ideologies contradict themselves, that simulacra don't have originals, or that gender representations are artificial?" (141). Sedgwick's turn to affect and performance theory, particularly routed through the work of Sylvan Tompkins, redirected the tendencies of critique from an epistemological milieu to a corporealized neopsychoanalytics yet still predicated on the composition of a reading. These tendencies were not entirely dissimilar to but not at all self-identical to the movements toward compositional affectivity made by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaux* in 1980 and throughout much of their collaborative and individual writing. Deleuze and Guattari's work, however, did not turn back toward reception and readings, nor toward the psychoanalytic, but rather toward a radical material compositionism predicated on the ethological and the ontological, fed by Baruch Spinoza, Henri Bergson, Gilbert Simondon, and others. Retrospectively, this work has come to be known as assemblage theory. Many digital media and network theorists and tactical media critics engaged Deleuze and Guattari specifically to address issues of complex powers, forces, exposures, connectivities, interactivities and nonlinear structurations in digital media.

Assemblage theory, in turn, leads us back to Latour, whose Actor Network Theory relies on both assemblage and performance. In each of these instances, an attempt to invent a production-based theoretical method is at play, methods through which the limitations, constraints, and unintended consequences of critique, forcible exposures, and practices of reading that inevitably recall the word "unveiling" and the mid-nineteenth century Marxian industrial technologies and methods from whence they came might be modulated to retain the social and political valences and work they have enacted through the academic paradigms of critical and cultural studies while addressing contemporary technological and material conditions.

Following up on his earlier challenge to the work of critique as violent exposure, Latour has taken an additional step in a recent piece in *New Literary History* with the provocative title, "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'" (2010), which I quote at length to give a full sense of the problem and Latour's potential methodological solution:

> In a first meaning, compositionism could stand as an alternative to critique (I don't mean a critique of critique but a *reuse* of critique; not an even more critical critique but rather critique acquired secondhand—so to speak—and *put to a different use*). To be sure, critique did a wonderful job of debunking prejudices, enlightening nations, and prodding minds, but, as I have argued elsewhere, it "ran out of steam" because it was predicated on the discovery of a true world of realities lying behind a *veil* of appearances. This beautiful staging had the great advantage of creating a huge difference of potential between the world of delusion and the world of reality. . . . But it also had the immense drawback of *creating a massive gap between what was felt and what was real.* Ironically, given the Nietzschean fervor of so many iconoclasts, critique relies on a rear world of the beyond, that is, on a transcendence that is no less transcendent for being fully secular. With critique, you may debunk, reveal, unveil, but only as long as you *establish, through this process of creative destruction*, a privileged access to the world of reality behind the veils of appearances. Critique, in other words, has all the limits of utopia: it relies on the certainty of the world beyond this world. By contrast, for compositionism, there is no world of beyond. It is all about immanence. (474–75, emphasis added)

As a compositionist, digital media practitioner, and theorist, whose understanding of the word "composition" includes but far exceeds visions of a first-year writing classroom, I was shocked by Latour's newfound way through or beyond the impasse of (1) throw the political baby out with the bathwater by moving away from critique altogether or (2) enact a "more critical critique" *of* critique, which is a zero-sum, paralytic game, correlate to the navel-gazing, linguistic-turn accusations against theory during the cultural and theory wars of the 1980s and 1990s (and reemerging now in the digital humanities). Instead, Latour's explicit way through takes up a moment in critical praxis, "this process of creative destruction"—a clever allusion to Joseph Schumpeter, which rhetorically aligns the movement of negative critique to the movement of capital as well as is an allusion to the constellated work of Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben, and Carl Schmitt on establishing, that is, constitutive violence through which "you establish a privileged access to the world of reality behind the veils of appearances" (475). And from which, as Sedgwick points out, one translates the truths of this world to the dullard or naive masses, who must be constructed as deluded and hallucinatory denizens of a totalizing Matrix.

Latour locates a creationary moment in the critical impulse but one through which, up until now, a wholesale *destruction* is the created and with it "a massive gap between what was felt and what was real." So the hypothesis from this compositionist's manifesto becomes, what might happen if this critical impulse, described as "reuse" (remix) and "secondhand" (mash up), operated not through creative destruction but creative construction, or what I have been calling composing creative critique?

And I would briefly add one final problem that requires a shift in critical practice. Critique's primary action is that of exposure, and if informatic technologies have altered one aspect of politics and culture it would be a reconfiguration of what is exposed and exposable and what remains illegibly *layered*—not veiled. The Internet and digital technologies provide a set of platforms and affordances for *exposing* human actions and older, analog, informatic archives (alphabetic documentation, legal records, etc.) superbly; for example, Wikileaks and recent events in North Africa and the Middle East resonate with political affectivity and effectivity. We live exposed. Might we begin to experiment with ways to shift or move out of the utopian ideal of unveiling the already unveiled, executed through acts of destructive creation, to take up the troubling of affective disjuncture between what is felt and what is real and to move from interrogative readings to interactive, critical "reuse" compositions through what Latour terms a "progressivism" that is predicated on immanence and upon what I would argue are nontrivially changed material conditions? Furthermore, might we also begin to recognize the massive crisis in informatic literacies, layers of computational and networked codifications, in which few are able to read and write, much the less able to do so critically or tactically? And it is at this point that the affordances, affective and creative, of digital media and computation need to enter this critical and cultural assemblage. Digital and computational work simultaneously documents, establishes, and affectively produces an iteration of real worlds (small "w"), worlds both felt and real but multimodally layered worlds. And in the creation of context, relationality, and interactivity, the lived collaboration of the "user" (and in the classroom, the "student") becomes a performance, a necessary flow and return of participatory and synaesthetic rhetorics. If the critical impulse is to become inventive, creational, and social, and with it critical and cultural studies, then the entire constellation of context, affect, and embodiment must remain viably dynamic and collaborative in digital and computational work.

Coda, for the Open

Let me finish by offering and advocating for an experimental reopening of this work. Computational and digital modes offer a huge range of potential critical and cultural affordances, and the key to this potential lies in their public and accessible capacities for phenomenological transfer as affective, lived, and located experience, embodied and culturally complex, and for creative and critical making and doing, for creative critique in a world constitutive of many worlds that continue to need more critically and culturally informed constructions and always need more relational and ethical participation and interaction. Therefore, digital and computational practitioners must move away from the practices and logic of unifying standards and instrumentality, as well as rationalizing and consolidating genres—for genres, like academic disciplines, are not immanent. They are produced through

labored containment and through a logic of similitude against difference. Digital and computational modes are embedded, object oriented, networked, enacted, and relational. The digital humanities is one subset of computational and digitally mediated practices, though its current discursive regime articulates itself as an iteration of the one world, a world both felt and real. But work in computation and digital media is, in fact, a radically heterogeneous and a multimodally layered—read, not visible—set of practices, constraints, and codifications that operate below the level of user interaction. In this layered invisibility lies our critical work. So no, our ethics, methods, and theory are *not transparent* in our tools—unless you have the serious know-how to critically make them or to hack them. So let's work in and teach the serious know-how of code and critique, computation and cultural studies, collaboration and multimodal composing as so many literacies, capacities, and expressivities attuned to our moment and to the contexts and conditions in which we find ourselves. Let's take up the imperatives of a relational ethics in discussion and in practices and methods through composing creative critical media.

NOTES

Enormous thanks are owed to Jentery Sayers, Tara McPherson, and of course Matt Gold for helpful editorial suggestions and citation reminders. Any and all failings belong to me.

1. I am intentionally not citing the sources of the first and second epigraphs, as my intention in using these quotations is to point to problems, not to indict individuals.

2. The echoes of New Critical scientism and objective formalism in contemporary discourses of digital humanities as a strict computational humanities will be taken up later in this essay.

3. This refers to a *New York Times* Opinionator post authored by Stanley Fish, "French Theory in America," April 6, 2008, regarding the American (mis)appropriation of French theory, spurred by the then-imminent publication of François Cussett's book, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, published in 2008.

4. I have heard a version of this position publicly articulated in at least four discussions of the politics and ethics of *The* Digital Humanities from October, 2010, through March, 2011, and have elected to use the latest as an epigraph. It is also worth quoting Patricia Cohen's *New York Times* November 16, 2010, interview with Tom Scheinfeldt on this subject in "Humanities 2.0: Digital Keys for Unlocking Humanities Riches" (a title well worth critical reflection in itself): "In Mr. Scheinfeldt's view academia has moved into 'a post-theoretical age.' This 'methodological moment,' he said, is similar to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when scholars were preoccupied with collating and cataloging the flood of information brought about by revolutions in communication, transportation and science. The practical issues of discipline building, of assembling an annotated bibliography, of defining the research agenda and what it means to be a historian 'were the main work of a great number of scholars,' he said."

The correspondence of "this 'methodological moment'" to that of "the late 19th and early 20th centuries" also parallels the impetus to return to the early twentieth-century New Critical paradigm that I have already noted and will elaborate further. What goes entirely unacknowledged in Cohen's paraphrase of Scheinfeldt's position vis-à-vis "theory" is that this articulation of "a post-theoretical age" in itself constitutes and culminates in a formal theory of nonreflexive "practice": "collati[on], . . . catalog[ues], . . . disciplin[es], . . . assembl[ages], . . . [and] defini[tions]."

5. Admittedly, I was not in attendance, so this impression may say more about who tweets what, but conversations with several folk who were in attendance and the subsequent flood of postconference dialogue through connected Twitter threads and blogs reinforced this perception.

6. This issue was *mildly* taken to task in the weeks following the MLA. Niceness conflicted with the acknowledgment of the emergence of a "star system" and uneven inclusion in *The* Digital Humanities. Matt Kirschenbaum mentioned the conflict of niceness with the "asymmetry of networked relationships" in his blogpost "The (DH) Stars Come Out In LA (January 13, 2011): "We often seek to defuse that [asymmetry of relations] with testimonials about digital humanities' 'niceness,' or more tellingly how collectively open and available we all tend to be. . . . But while being nice is good, being nice is not, or may no longer be, enough." Of course, this begs two questions I asked earlier: Is "nice" good? Is this "niceness" not the outcome of a particular distribution of "assymetr[ical]" relations?

7. While one reader took issue with this aspect of the essay and helpfully pointed me to William Pannapacker's extremely well-known redux of Modern Language Association 2011 in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, this phrase and its social implications were already heavily circulated through DH prior to MLA11. This and several of the other conflicts this essay discusses, including the compulsive need to posit DH against Big Theory, are evident in Pannapacker's summation of the conference: "The digital humanities have some internal tensions, such as the occasional divide between builders and theorizers, and coders and non-coders. But the field, as a whole, seems to be developing an in-group, out-group dynamic that threatens to replicate the culture of Big Theory back in the 80s and 90s, which was alienating to so many people. It's perceptible in the universe of Twitter: We read it, but we do not participate. It's the *cool-kids' table*" ("Pannapacker," my italics).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adorno, Theodor. "Letters to Walter Benjamin (1936)." *New Left Review* 81 (1973). http://newleftreview.org/?page=article&view=14/.

———. "Cultural Criticism and Society." In *Prisms*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1983.

Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics.* Paris: Les Presses du Reel, 2002.

Berry, David M. "The Computational Turn: Thinking about the Digital Humanities." *Culture Machine* 12 (2011). http://www.culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/article/view/440/470/.

Cohen, Patricia. "Humanities 2.0: Digital Keys for Unlocking Humanities Riches." *New York Times*, November 16, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/17/arts/17digital.html/.

Cussett, François. *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.

Daniel, Sharon. "Hybrid Practices." *Cinema Journal* 48, no. 2 (Winter 2009): 154–59.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaux.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.

Eliot, T. S. *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot.* New York: Harvest Books, 1975.

———. "Tradition and the Individual Talent (1922)." Accessed March 27, 2010. http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html/.

Fish, Stanley. "French Theory in America." *New York Times*, April 6, 2008. http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/04/06/french-theory-in-america/.

Irigaray, Luce. *This Sex Which Is Not One.* Translated by Catherine Porter. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985.

Kirschenbaum, Matthew G. "The (DH) Stars Come Out in LA." January 11, 2011. http://mkirschenbaum.wordpress.com/2011/01/13/the-dh-stars-come-out-in-la-2/.

Lampland, Martha, and Susan Leigh Star. "Reckoning with Standards." In *Standards and Their Stories: How Quantifying, Classifying, and Formalizing Practices Shape Everyday Life*, edited by Martha Lampland and Susan Leigh Star. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009.

Latour, Bruno. "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto.'" *New Literary History* 41, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 471–90.

———. "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern." *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 2 (2008). http://www.uchicago.edu/research/jnl-crit-inq/issues/v30/30n2.Latour.html.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider and Other Essays.* Berkeley, Calif.: Crossing, 1984.

Moretti, Franco. *Graphs Maps Trees.* New York: Verso, 2005.

Pannapacker, William. "Pannapacker at MLA: Digital Humanities Triumphant?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* January 8, 2011. http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/pannapacker-at-mla-digital-humanities-triumphant/30915/.

Ranciere, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics.* New York: Continuum, 2004.

Ross, Toni. "Aesthetic Autonomy and Interdisciplinarity: A Response to Nicolas Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics.'" *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 5, no. 3 (2006): 167–81.

Scheinfeldt, Tom. "Why Digital Humanities Is 'Nice'" in *Found History.* May 26, 2010. http://www.foundhistory.org/2010/05/26/why-digital-humanities-is-%E2%80%9Cnice%E2%80%9D/. Reprinted in this volume.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity.* Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002.

Spingarn, J. E. *Creative Criticism and Other Essays.* New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1931.

Stross, Randall. "What Has Driven Women out of Computer Science?" *New York Times,* November 15, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/16/business/16digi.html/.

Thomas, William G. II. "Computing and the Historical Imagination." In *A Companion to Digital Humanities*, edited by Susan Schreibman, Ray Siemens, and John Unsworth. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004. http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companion/.

Wikimedia. "File:WMFstratplanSurvey1.png." *Wikimedia Strategic Plan.* February, 2011. http://strategy.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:WMFstratplanSurvey1.pngandhttp://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/foundation/c/c0/WMF_StrategicPlan2011_spreads.pdf.