

In McPherson's article *Why Are the Digital Humanities So White? Or Thinking the Histories of Race and Computation*, she takes the long way round in her analysis of just that question. To be honest, I probably don't have the greatest handle on some of her points, but one point that will be my main topic of discussion for this post will be context and bias. Digital humanities as a field has the capability of acquiring and utilizing very large sets of data, but it isn't just what we do with the data as digital humanists that matter, but rather, how we look at it, and understand the reasoning and context behind the data.

The reason I chose to respond on McPherson's article in relation to context and bias is because she tries to make the connection between the largely white male dominated IT industry of the present, and racial discrimination of the 60's. She does this by looking at the context of the time period (1960's) when early programmers were developing the UNIX operating system. A fundamental point of her argument is that the culture of that era affected how the early programmers developed UNIX, and as a result, today we can see the effects of a more discriminatory culture reflected in today's digital humanities, and the IT industry.

In my opinion, McPherson goes beyond contextualizing data, and creates a narrative from her contextualization in order to try put legitimacy behind her argument. I think this creates a point of bias for her argument. It is easy enough to craft a narrative around a select set of contextualized data that best suits one's own opinion, and I believe that is what McPherson has done here. It feels as though to me that she is making a stretch to connect two points that otherwise would not connect without her carefully crafted narrative.

In an article titled *Circling around texts and language: towards "pragmatic modelling" in Digital Humanities*, written by Arianna Ciula and Cristina Marras, I found a few lines that I feel really relate to the point I am trying to express. "DH researchers have engaged with linear texts all the way towards discontinuous narratives, for instance as structured in relational databases. In addition, texts as objects being modelled in DH research are not only or mainly verbal and encompass hybrid modalities such as maps [Eide 2013]. Indeed, dynamic aspects of texts as modelled in DH research and connected to the nature of cultural artefacts as such could be exemplified in a variety of ways. Researchers engaged in scholarly digital editing, for instance, have attempted at modelling the whole range of material incarnations of texts and the associated interpretative processes from manuscript witnesses to printed editions, from diplomatic transcriptions to critical editing. Hence, often within one and the same digital editing project, textual models do not sit still; they shift along multiple axes with respect to their objects and interpretations." (Ciula, Marras). The main point here is that due to the possible complexity of data sets, and how that data is organized or visualized, it is easy for contrasting opinions and interpretations to exist in the realm of the digital humanities in regards to the same set of data. To tie this back to context, I feel in the same way Ciula and Marras talk about interpretations of models, it is possible to interpret the context behind a point of history, as McPherson does with the development of UNIX in a way that fits her argument. Similarly, I could see it possible for someone else to create an argument that contrasts McPherson, that creates a different narrative from a different interpretation of contextualizing a past point in history.

In comparing McPherson's argument to Drucker's article, *Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display*, I feel as though Drucker takes an approach that is similar in terms of bias, but opposite in terms

of context. Drucker's use of graphs takes data, and presents it in a visualization that is void of much context. This may be seen as an attempt to keep an unbiased standpoint, but in fact it does the opposite. Graphs can be just as biased as selective contextualization, as the parameters of the graph affect in which way data is represented.

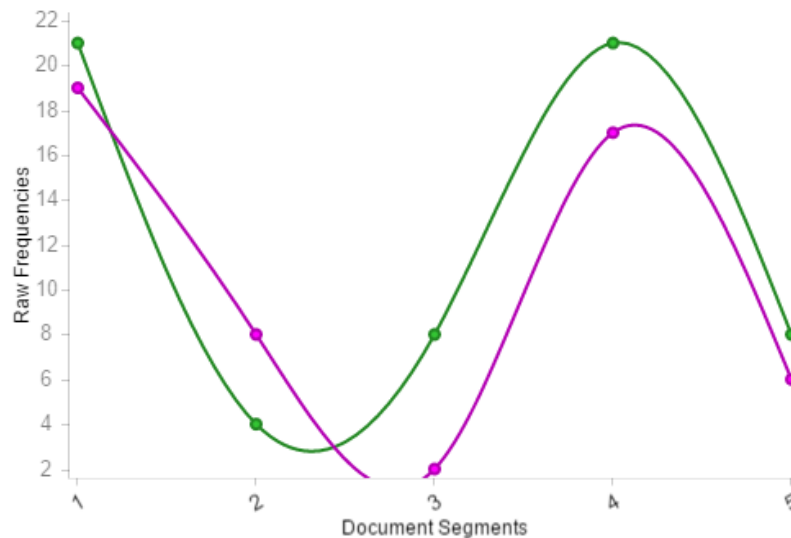


Figure 1. (Relation between "Race" and "Digital".)

To provide an example of what I mean when talking about the bias of visualizations, figure 1 above shows the correlation between the words "Digital (green)" and "Race (pink)" in McPherson's article. As a visualization in this form, the data loses its context, and we are left with a seemingly unbiased correlation. However, as the contexts drops, it is opened up to greater interpretation. From this visualization, it might be possible to create an argument or narrative that uses the elements of race and digital in a way that McPherson never intended in her article, but someone else may look at this, and put their own context, their own narrative to it in order for it to fit their own argument. As a result, a simple visualization of two words can be seen as biased, because of both its openness to interpretation, and in its content.

I think it is important for us as not just digital humanists, but as consumers of content, to be aware of how bias and context affect the data and digital content we interact with on a daily basis, and be aware of not just what data you are being shown, but also the data you are not being shown.

Works Cited:

1. McPherson, T. (2012). Debates in the Digital Humanities. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <http://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/debates/text/29>

2 . Drucker, J. (2011). Humanities Approaches to Graphical Display. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/5/1/000091/000091.html>

3 . Ciula, A., & C. (2016). Circling around texts and language: towards "pragmatic modelling" in Digital Humanities. Retrieved March 10, 2017, from <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/10/3/000258/000258.html>