

# Manifesto of Modernist Digital Humanities

**WHEREAS** mainstream digital techniques reflect a naïve quantitative POSITIVISM;

**WHEREAS** that POSITIVISM appears as a REALISM—as claim of representational fidelity—in the midst of **MODERNIST ANALYSIS**;

**WHEREAS** critical self-  
reflexivity calls for  
a QUALITATIVE characterization  
or EVALUATION of methodologies  
as well as  
technical DISCLOSURES of  
sample sizes,  
data gaps,  
and HUMAN intervention  
in  
**ALGORITHMICALLY GENERATED DATA;**

**WHEREAS** it seems modernist  
digital humanities has  
**JUST**  
stepped past that threshold into THINGNESS;

# IT SEEMS

that the digital humanities use a methodological  
REALISM to investigate artistic MODERNISM.

# IT SEEMS

inappropriate that we would pursue methodological  
REALISM to the exclusion of methodological  
MODERNISM.

But if realism REQUIRES or SUGGESTS

beginnings and endings

probabilistic event trajectories that emphasize causality

three-dimensional characterization of middle-class  
characters

richly detailed political, economic, and social contexts

a commitment to objectivity, believability, or naturalism

a rejection of magic, divine intervention, or supernatural  
elements

formal coherence and continuity

things and stuff that are so 19th century and so bankrupt and  
exposed by Nietzsche and to which, like gluten, we may be  
allergic

Then is NAÏVE, CHAUVINISTIC

positivism even realist at all?

**WHAT**

would a better methodological realism look like?

**WHAT**

would a methodological modernism look like?

Taking seriously the discontinuities of  
consciousness,  
experience,  
and  
social hierarchies

does NOT require  
jettisoning **MATHEMATICS**

so much as  
SKEWING or REIMAGINING  
numbers, planes, scales, and graphs.

( WE WHISPER IN YOUR EAR A GREAT SECRET:  
THEY HAVE BEEN SYMBOLS ALL ALONG. )

If you value  
STATISTICAL RIGOR  
above all things,  
we can wait as you **CLICK OFF** and wish you well.

**NOW THEN.**

We can **DECOUPLE**  
**methodological strategies** from  
**the content of the objects**  
we study.

NOTHING  
is stopping us  
from using  
MODERNIST METHODS  
for understanding  
REALIST TEXTS.

OR  
  
using  
REALIST METHODS  
for understanding  
MODERNIST TEXTS.

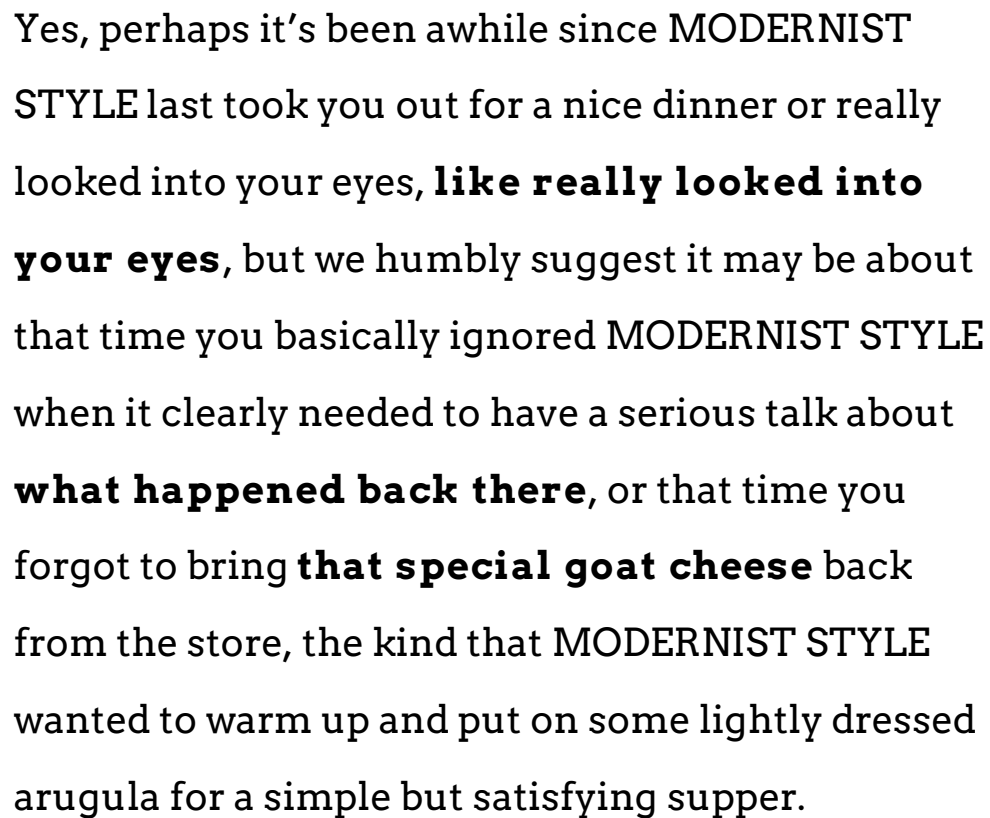
There's not necessarily a DEBT to be modernist with a  
MODERNIST TEXT.  
(unless DEBT is how you manage your cognitive  
economy, in which case enjoy your symptom!)

MODERNIST DIGITAL STRATEGIES should  
themselves be

**critical,  
challenging,  
open-ended,  
discontinuous,  
fragmented,  
polyphonic,  
disruptive,  
perverse,  
strange,  
harsh.**

Presumably  
(once upon a time)  
you thought MODERNIST STYLE was  
worthy of your  
ATTENTION and CURIOSITY.





Yes, perhaps it's been awhile since MODERNIST STYLE last took you out for a nice dinner or really looked into your eyes, **like really looked into your eyes**, but we humbly suggest it may be about that time you basically ignored MODERNIST STYLE when it clearly needed to have a serious talk about **what happened back there**, or that time you forgot to bring **that special goat cheese** back from the store, the kind that MODERNIST STYLE wanted to warm up and put on some lightly dressed arugula for a simple but satisfying supper.

We can reconfigure works from other time periods through modernist methods. Modernism therefore becomes a DIGITAL STRATEGY that can inform

- project development,
- tool building,
- visualization design, &
- textual interpretation.

# **WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO READ OTHER MOVEMENTS AND CENTURIES THROUGH METHODS LATENT IN MODERNISM?**

**Might**

we then be able to extract

a true theory of modernism—

## **A MODERNIST MODE OF ANALYSIS?**

The heightened reflexivity purchased by trying to  
develop MODERNIST TOOLS for MODERNIST TEXTS  
and MODERNIST CULTURES will ensure that the  
SPECTER of MODERNISM in all its

aesthetic and

historical and

spatial particularity

will be more VIVID & THERE at every stage of a  
project.

**Might**

we BOIL down  
the realist novel

or

the bildungsroman

or

the scientific romance

or

the epic poem

or

the manifesto

or

the stream-of-consciousness novel

into SETS

of

natural expressions

or

tags

or

metadata

or  
protocols  
or  
applications  
that we can use to  
TRANSLATE texts into different genres?

# **GENRES BECOME ALGORITHMS A MACHINIC NARRATOLOGY**

Isn't this still rather metaphorical, you ask.

OF COURSE.

But the figurations are natively literary  
(natively-literary-studies).

Do get back to us when you assemble  
persuasive arguments that consist  
exclusively of things that PROVABLY  
exist in front of you right now.

Perhaps you can drop them on your  
foot or run into them to ensure they  
are not metaphors.

**Send pictures of the bruises!**

Let loose generic imperatives and literary movements  
and lists of formal characteristics of modernism.

They do not need euthanasia; they need to get let out  
in the air, out of their cells, deployed through digital  
humanities approaches to deform texts of interest.

We continue to invest in the heavy  
industry of making machines out of  
literary theory.

It's okay, really.

When was the last time you wrote/said/argued,  
"Jameson/Latour/Haraway/Agamben/Sedgwick/D&G wrote/said/argued"?

**Probably yesterday.**

Don't let's lie to each other

**anymore.**

So in addition to importing interpretive  
machines from other disciplines, use those detested  
periodizations \*

\* you don't really detest them, btw, it just sounds legit &  
heavy when you interrogate, problematize, and  
complicate them

as imperatives that invade other periods, other  
genres.

We can **DECOUPLE**  
**methodological strategies** from  
**the content of the objects**  
we study.

Or RECOUPLE them

sure, whatever.

So long as you rekindle that

**FLAME**

with MODERNIST STYLE,

we're just happy  
you're happy.

Signed,

Alex Christie (@axchristie),

Andrew Pilsch (@oncomouse),

Shawna Ross (@ShawnaRoss),

Katie Tanigawa (@katietani)