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Final Project

Annotated Bibliography

Introduction

The goal of my final project was to learn more about the digital humanities (DH) and to experiment with some digital humanities research related to my interests in literary studies. My annotated bibliography focuses on articles defining the digital humanities—pieces which, as Matthew Kirschenbaum notes, "are already genre pieces" (3). Several common themes emerged from my reading. According to this group of essays, the digital humanities value openness, collaboration, and making or building things over or in addition to traditional academic output. They seek to challenge the "solitary scholar" image of the traditional humanities, which tend to value single-author research. Digital humanists share methodology more than anything else, and because DH methods require a range of technical and scholarly skills and knowledge, they require collaboration.

In addition to these common values, the essays that I read consistently argued for DH as a vehicle for challenging the institutional status quo of the academy—whether it's the single-author model in the humanities through collaborative projects, or creating open-access projects that challenge the process of scholarly publishing that keeps much scholarly output isolated to expensive journals that the public lacks access to. In making this argument, however, these authors pay insufficient attention to both the ways that other disciplines (such as ethnic studies, queer studies, and women's and gender studies) are already challenging the status quo, and the barriers to participating in these more disruptive projects faced by women, people of color, and junior scholars. For example, while several writers note the lack of diversity in DH, and the fact that institutions value single-author projects and traditional publications for tenure and promotion, they don't suggest how DH might support younger and marginalized scholars attempting to do this work.

In addition to exploring the contours of DH as a discipline, I also examined a DH project from Stanford, "Mapping the Republic of Letters," which suggests some directions for marrying traditional and DH methods. My own coding project went in a different direction, exploring how I might use shelf (tagging) data from Goodreads to understand reader preferences and aid in discovery of diverse books. I elaborate on that aspect of my project in my code narrative.

Section 1: Defining the Digital Humanities

Flanders, Julia. "The Productive Unease of 21st-Century Digital Scholarship" 3, no. 3 (2009). http://www.digitalhumanities.org/dhq/vol/3/3/000055/000055.html.

In this essay, Flanders explores the relationship of digital tools to traditional humanities scholarship, which is characterized by what she calls a "productive unease," between the progressive narratives of technological advancement (more, faster, better), and the "resilience of fundamental habits and assumptions concerning literary value, scholarly method, and academic standards" (para. 8). That unease emerges primarily in what John Unsworth has called humanities computing, which Flanders defines as a narrower subset of DH: humanities computing is a process and practice of formal representation (in XML, databases, or visualization tools) that "effect a distancing, a translation which . . . provides a view into . . . the deep discursive structures of the original expression" (para. 11). Rather than understanding humanities computing as a simple tool for analysis, Flanders argues that the process of developing structured representations of texts (broadly speaking—she includes images and sound in her definition of a text) is itself an analytical undertaking that causes "a sense of friction between familiar mental habits and the affordances of the tool . . . that prompts further thought and engagement" (para. 12).

Flanders identifies 3 main areas of "unease" in digital scholarship that are producing interesting questions and inquiry. First, digital scholarship has "produced an interest in understanding medium and its role in anchoring our textual perceptions," prompting new exploration of the affordances of both digital and traditional media (para. 15). Second, digital scholarship challenges atomized institutional structures because of the collaborative nature of DH projects, "which by their nature raise questions about the politics of work, and occupy a space that is naturally and productively critical of current tenure and reward systems" (para. 18). The pace of institutional adaptation is well behind the interdisciplinary projects that are growing from the digital humanities, but Flanders argues that that may productive, as well, because while "digital scholarship may thus be . . . to remain other to the standard disciplinary structures of the academy, . . . it makes us aware of discipline as both a formative intellectual constraint, and a somewhat arbitrary institutional reality" (para. 21). Finally, and most significantly for Flanders, digital scholarship "foreground[s] issues of how we model the sources we study, in such a way that they cannot be sidestepped" (para. 22). In other words, the process of formal encoding of texts makes it impossible to see them as a neutral object of study, as a printed edition might be, and can instead be seen as "a strategic representation" that makes certain scholarly approaches possible (para. 23).

According to Flanders, the major challenge of digital humanities scholarship is to bridge the gap between the high volume of data often used in digital projects and the "high labor 'craft' activities" of traditional humanities scholarship, which focus on precision and detail. Ultimately, Flanders argues, the aim should not be resolution but "oscillating, dialectical pulsation that is the scholarly mind at work" (para. 27)—constantly raising more questions and avenues of inqury rather than seeking an endpoint.

Gold, Matthew K. "The Digital Humanities Moment." Introduction to *Debates in the Digital Humanities,* edited by Matthew K. Gold, ix-xvi. University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

In this introduction to a collection of essays examining the rise of the digital humanities, Gold explores some of the key questions, debates, and stakes of DH research and its place in the university. Gold begins by contextualizing the rise of the digital humanities in the broader context of higher education and academic research, including peer review, authorship and collaboration, the place of the humanities, and the increased reliance of universities on adjunct labor. The digital humanities, Gold argues, "seems positioned to address many of those changes . . . even as (and perhaps because) it upends academic life as we know it" (ix-x). While, Gold doesn't strongly support this assertion of DH as the saving grace of the academy (and even later undermines it by writing that the collection "is not a celebration of the digital humanities but an interrogation of it" [xii]), he does point to some of the important contributions of DH to academic structures as a whole, and highlights key questions that are explored in more detail later in the volume.

Gold points out that as the digital humanities have grown, there has been more disagreement and debate about what DH is and does, particularly "between those who use new digital tools to aid relatively traditional scholarly projects and those who believe that DH is most powerful as a disruptive political force that has the potential to reshape fundamental aspects of academic practice" (x). In the process, debates about the definition of digital humanities also raise questions about scholarship, especially in the humanities—for example, can writing code for a scholarly tool be included in a tenure file for a humanist? Does it "count" as scholarship? Gold further highlights some of the questions and critiques of the digital humanities that have been raised, such as issues of accessibility for scholars at smaller colleges or budget-restricted institutions, its relationship to new media studies, and its documented lack of attention to issues of identity and pedagogy, or politics more generally, and its lack of diversity.

One area that Gold convincingly argues for DH as possibly changing the nature of humanities scholarship is in his description of the process of collecting and evaluating essays for the volume, which included an open peer review process in which all the contributors to the volume read and commented on each other's work on a password-protected website before the blind peer review conducted by the press. This collaborative production of the volume, Gold writes, "wound up imparting a sense of community and collectivity to the project as a whole" and led contributors to engage with each other's work in their revisions, and to acknowledge feedback from one another in the finished volume.

Kijas, Anna E. "An Introduction to Getting Started in the Digital Humanities for Library Professionals." *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2017): 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1080/10588167.2017.1274595.

This short article gives a practical overview of the digital humanities for librarians, with a brief description of tools and methods, and recommendations for further reading. Though Kijas focuses on music librarians, this article is applicable to any academic librarians interested in learning more about digital humanities and how they can play a role in DH projects. Kijas argues that librarians already have a basis of skills and knowledge that make them good collaborators in

DH projects, including knowledge of "a variety of schemas, standards, controlled vocabularies, metadata, content management systems, and other infrastructures" (2). These skills are essential to digital humanities, Kijas argues, because they make it possible for scholars "to build and develop sustainable projects" (2).

While Kijas does not go into depth about DH projects, she discusses one of the key aspects that distinguish it from other types of humanities scholarship: DH projects are focused building or making things. She quotes DH scholar Stephen Ramsay, who writes, "Building is, for us [DH scholars], a new kind of hermeneutic—one that is quite a bit more radical than taking the traditional methods of humanistic inquiry and applying them to digital objects" (2). What librarians can bring to the table is the knowledge of the collections of objects that DH scholars will want to use in their creations, and the practical building blocks to help them create those projects.

The remainder of the article focuses on exploring and recommending resources for further self-study, whether the focus is on learning specific tools, learning more about methods and projects, or learning to code. A resource list at the end of the article includes sections of exercises and tutorials (including links to Codecademy as well as specific DH tutorials), DH tool directories, and a list for further reading.

Kirschenbaum, Matthew. "What Is Digital Humanities and What's It Doing in English Departments?" In *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, edited by Matthew K. Gold, 3–11. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv8hq.4

This short essay details the emergence of the digital humanities as a term and as a field from about 2001 to 2008. While a small group of humanities scholars had been exploring the relationship between computing and the humanities since the 1980s, under the heading of "humanities computing," in 2001 and 2002 the term "digital humanities" was chosen for both an anthology (Blackwell's *Companion to Digital Humanities*) and the name for a scholarly organization that merged two groups working in what was not yet called digital humanities. In 2006, with the term well-established thanks to conferences, organizations, and publications, the NEH established the Digital Humanities Initiative, favoring "digital humanities" because "it seemed to cast a wider net than 'humanities computing' which seemed to imply a form of computing, whereas 'digital humanities' implied a form of humanism" (6). Finally, in 2008, the Initiative became the Office of Digital Humanities, securing it a permanent place in the NEH.

In addition to this history, Kirschenbaum's essay explores some of the contours of DH in literature and language disciplines, both socially and methodologically. In this section, Kirschenbaum gives some substance to Gold's claim above that the digital humanities could be an intervention into the crises faced by higher education in the 21st century. Methodologically, the digital humanities share values of "collaboration, openness, nonhierarchical relations, and agility, [which] might be an instrument for real resistance or reform" (8). This ethos manifests in debates about academic publishing and its role in tenure and promotion, where the push by faculty to retain the rights to their work and to disseminate it freely, outside of costly academic publishing structures, tie in to critiques of "dysfunctional and outmoded practices" of academic

employment. In another example, a recent PhD who was unable to present at the 2009 Modern Language Association convention due to the cost of travel had his paper on the casualization of academic labor read for him while he tweeted and published it on his blog, leading to a wider circulation and discussion than most conference papers. While it remains unclear how these conversations and incidents might translate to meaningful reform, especially for graduate students, adjunct faculty, and junior faculty, Kirschenbaum's examples show their potential.

Finally, Kirschenbaum discusses the place of the digital humanities in English departments, arguing that DH research has a natural home in English departments for several reasons: because text-based data processing has long been associated with linguistics and other fields associated with English departments; because of growing interest in digital archives for methods in literary studies since the 1980s; and because of the historical openness of English departments to interdisciplinary studies.

Spiro, Lisa. "'This Is Why We Fight': Defining the Values of the Digital Humanities." In *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, edited by Matthew K. Gold, 16–35. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. http://www.jstor.org.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv8hq.6.

In this essay, part of the section on defining digital humanities in the *Debates in the Digital Humanities* collection, Lisa Spiro argues for a shift in focus in the conversation about what the digital humanities are and do: "Rather than debating who is in and who is out, the DH community needs to develop a keener sense of what it stands for and what is at stake in its work" by collaboratively developing "a flexible statement of values" (17). Spiro makes a distinction between a statement of values and a code of ethics, with the former emphasizing a set of principles to guide decision-making and frame conversations about the field, while the latter is more focused on rules to govern behavior. A statement of values must be flexible, and "serves in part to inspire and to help an organization set priorities" (18). At the basis of Spiro's argument is Kathleen Fitzpatrick's statement that "the key problems that we [the DH community] face again and again are social rather than technological in nature," having to do with collaboration, relationships with institutions, and the nature of academic work (17).

Spiro emphasizes the importance of a transparent process for creating such a statement of values, arguing that "the process of producing a values statement may be as important as the statement itself, since that process will embody how the community operates and what it embraces" (18). She seeks to begin the conversation by laying out a preliminary set of values drawn from the fields that overlap in the digital humanities: "the humanities; libraries, museums, and cultural heritage organizations; and networked culture," which "share a common aim to advance knowledge, foster innovation, and serve the public" (19). Spiro also examines the potential conflicts among these stakeholders; for example, she writes, "emphasis on specialization and professional identity [in traditional academic humanities] clashes with the collaborative, crowdsourced approaches of the digital humanities" (20).

From her exploration of the intersecting values of digital humanities stakeholders, and various discussions of what defines the digital humanities, Spiro proposes a preliminary list of 5 values: openness, collaboration, collegiality and connectedness, diversity, and experimentation. Spiro's

treatment of this list of values mirrors the critique that Gold mentions of the problems with the politics of and lack of diversity in DH. While the other 4 principles receive extended discussion and examples, the "diversity" section offers little in the way of concrete examples or suggestions of how to address the issues it notes, settling instead to simply declare that "the community works toward diversity as a goal" (28). Given the underrepresentation that women and people of color experience in technical fields in particular, this section should be given greater space and thought to push the conversation forward, as Spiro wishes to do. Nonetheless, on the whole, Spiro makes a convincing case for a statement of values as a defining document for the digital humanities.

Wilkens, M. "Digital Humanities and Its Application in the Study of Literature and Culture." *Comparative Literature* 67, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 11–20. https://doi.org/10.1215/00104124-2861911.

Wilkins discusses how and why computational methods are being used in literary and cultural studies, arguing that computational methods are making a significant contribution to literary studies because much literary analysis is already "implicitly quantitative, pattern-based, and dependent on reductive models of the texts [scholars] treat" (11). The use of computational methods both makes that implicit reliance explicit, and allows literary scholarship to work with large bodies of information in new and different ways. Indeed, Wilkins points out that a central contradiction in literary studies is that, while the literary disciplines "have long understood their projects in almost exclusively qualitative terms," they "often confront bafflingly great masses of source material" (11). Thus, the computational methods of the digital humanities have a great deal to contribute to how we understand those "great masses" of text.

Wilkins provides 3 examples of literary digital humanities projects and discusses the methods, approaches, and contributions of each. First, he discusses a text mining project that explored the influence of Goethe's early work on his later work through a method the author's call "topological reading," which is "attuned to the patterns by which groups of words co-occur in different texts" (12). This method allowed the authors of the study to group passages of Goethe's work for close reading. For Wilkins, the most significant benefit of this process is that it defamiliarized a canonical body of work and allowed possibilities for new perspectives.

The second project Wilkins discusses makes use of publication metadata to explore literary networks in the early- and mid-20th century in the U.S., China, and Japan, mapping how authors and journals are connected and how the networks function differently in different national contexts. Their research shows the roles played by authors who were not major power players in their networks, and suggesting new approaches for the study of those authors and more broadly "the continuing need for critical approaches attuned to the function of social-structural positions as such" (16). Finally, Wilkins discusses projects that exist at the intersection of the text mining and network analysis projects described above, which "seek to characterize fields of literary production via information extracted directly from very large bodies of text" (16). These types of projects have used topic modeling to map geographic literary influence, and to explore how literary language has changed over time.

Overall, Wilkins identifies two major contributions that these projects make: first, they intervene in existing scholarly conversations and offer new readings of established texts with the help of computational methods. Second, "they provide broad and genuinely new contextual information about the configuration of whole literary fields," offering a more cohesive view of the "bigger picture" of a field or historical context. Wilkins also identifies several barriers to the use of computational methods in literary studies. In addition to the social barriers—many literary scholars remain suspicious of digital humanities—there is also the problem of access to work under copyright, lack of technical knowledge among most humanities scholars, and for Wilkins's field of comparative literature, the problem of working across multiple languages.

Section 2: Example of a Digital Humanities Project

"Mapping the Republic of Letters." Accessed December 17, 2017.
http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/.

"Mapping the Republic of Letters" is a collaborative digital humanities project housed at Stanford University, which focuses on visualizing and exploring the connections among intellectuals in Europe and the Americas in the 16th-19th centuries through analysis of travel, publications, and correspondence networks. The project is made up of several overlapping case studies focusing on particular individuals, events, or institutions, which together help to map the larger shape and structure of intellectual networks of this time period.

Each case study includes data visualizations and analysis on the Republic of Letters website, and several have traditional scholarly publications and open source data associated with them. For example, the project, "The Correspondence Network of Benjamin Franklin: The London Decades" (http://republicofletters.stanford.edu/publications/franklin/), includes a discussion of the researchers' process, two published articles, data visualizations, a schema for its data tables, and a link to download the researchers' data from the Stanford Digital Repository.

This project as a whole shows how DH research might be blended with traditional humanities research and publication processes. The large datasets have potential to produce multiple in-depth studies that may be appropriate for publication in journals, while the interactive visualizations and datasets provide access to the information and analysis for students and other scholars to experiment with. This type of structure might lend itself to rethinking the scholarly monograph, both in the sense of replacing or supplementing the traditional print book, but also for making visible the processes of thinking and analysis that are often obscured, and inviting more contributors to join in.